The PERENNIAL BACHELOR by Anne Parrish

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The perennial bachelor.

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The PERENNIAL BACHELOR

By ANNE PARRISH

Author of

"A Pocketful of Poses," "Semi-Attached," etc.

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TO

FRANCES BRINCKLE ZERBEE

THE PERENNIAL BACHELOR

out from under dark scowling brows, brown hair that fell straight and limp from curling-rags even as they were unrolled, and a face covered with freckles. She was more like a boy than a girl, everyone said. She was always carrying hoptoads about in her hat, or tearing her petticoats climbing trees and sliding down the ice house roof. She was sometimes as bold as brass and sometimes one crimson blush of shyness, and she had the strangest ways of showing people that she loved them—boasting in front of them in a loud gruff voice, making awful faces, twisting one leg around the other, or standing on the sides of her feet.

Six-year-old May slept beside her in the big bed carved with oak-leaves and acorns, under the picture of the guardian angel hovering above the little brother and sister gathering wild flowers at the edge of the precipice. May had short bright brown curls foaming all over her head, and brown eyes with long curled lashes, and she knew perfectly well what Mamma's friends meant when they exclaimed, "Oh, *what* a little b-e-a-u-t-y!" She loved her pretty clothes, and never tore them as Maggie did, but would stroke her small muff or her best blue sash as another little girl might stroke a kitten; and Mamma had been dreadfully troubled once to find her kissing her best bonnet good-night. When May loved people she told them so, flinging her arms around them and kissing them again and again, which they found at first charming and presently exhausting, for she never knew when to stop,

and always had to be disentangled, like a burr or a kitten, and carried weeping from the room.

Sometimes, when there was company of an evening, Papa would pick her up out of bed and carry her downstairs in her nightgown to dance on the top of the piano, while Mamma played, not quite accurately, but with a lot of ripple and splash, and Papa sang in the voice that pierced so thrillingly the heart of his eldest daughter, lying awake in the dark:

" 'Sound, sound, the tambourine,
Welcome now the gipsy star;
Strike, strike the mandoline,
And the light guitar;
When the moon is beaming bright,
The gipsies dance, the gipsies dance;
'Neath the moonbeams' glittering ray,
Now their figures glance.
See, see, they trip along,
O'er the green, o'er the green,
List, list, the cheerful song,
To the merry, merry, merry, merry, merry, merry,
merry, merry, merry, merry, merry, merry,
tambourine!' "

And excited little May would hold up her long nightie and dance, while the company applauded. But she generally ended in tears. "May is very high-strung," Mamma would say, gently complacent.

Lily, who was four, lay in a cot beside the big bed, as fat and fast asleep as a milk-white kitten. Her hair

was palest silky yellow, curling up in little duck-tails from her fat neck, and her round eyes, so tight shut now, were like Mamma's, as blue as flower petals. She trotted through childhood's endless days on fat legs that could never catch up with Maggie and May, calling always, "Wait! Wait! Wait for Lily!"

Maggie, lying there, heard from below the swish, swish of Albert's broom, sweeping the porch; the squeak of the pump-handle as old Chloe filled the kettle; Trusty barking at the starlings. The beautiful day had begun.

The three little Campions spent the morning in the kitchen, drawn by the smell of baking cake, as bees are drawn to apple-blossoms, being stepped on and bumped into, stealing almonds, scraping icing-bowls and licking the sugary, buttery batter from the wooden cake spoons, until old Chloe shooed them out as if they were chickens.

Dressed alike in brown merino frocks and bibbed black aprons edged with quilling, with long tucked drawers showing beneath their full skirts, they sat squeezed together in the door of the kitchen shed, eating the hot little try-cakes with which old Chloe tested the oven. At their feet, on the rose-red bricks, silky black Trusty sat and watched each vanishing mouthful with drooling jaws and an agony of longing in his eyes. The pale spring sunshine lay on them delicately warm; starlings, shining and black as wet ink, swayed in the tree tops; and the weeping willow, hanging over

the whitewashed cabins across the road where the negro servants slept, was turning brightest yellow green. The small hot cakes with their crisp brown lace-like edgings were so delicious. Oh, everything was so nice! And Papa was coming home!

Great things were being done inside, for Uncle Willie and poor Aunt Priscilla and Cousin Lizzie and Cousin Sam were coming to dinner because it was Papa's birthday.

"Do you *really* think you ought to have us, Margaret?" Cousin Lizzie had asked. "In your condition?" For Mamma was expecting another baby in two months.

It seemed to Mamma not quite—well—*delicate*—of Lizzie to keep reminding her of her condition. She herself never spoke of it except reluctantly in answer to Papa. There was some excuse for him, he wanted a son so intensely, and then gentlemen were different. It was a fact that complicated life, but could not be denied. But Lizzie, with her sharp eyes and sharp tongue, was dreadfully embarrassing.

"I'll give you just what we'd have ourselves, Lizzie." Mamma had lied gently; and she wrote out the menu and carried it about tucked into her bodice like a love letter.

"Mock turtel soup, boiled turky with oyster sauce, roasted ham, chicken-pie, roast goose with applesauce, smoke-tongue, beats, cold-slaw, squash, salsify, fried

celery, almond pudding, mince pie, calf's foot jelly, blanc-mange."

There was a beautiful cut-paper trouser-frill for the roasted ham, and the crust of the chicken-pie, meltingly, tenderly brown, was ornamented with pie-crust stars and squiggles. As for the blanc-mange, the little girls had never seen anything so charming. It had been moulded in blown egg-shells, and lay in a nest of clear amber jelly and lemon peel cut in thin strips to look like straw.

Of course, today of all days, poor Aunt Priscilla had to come to help, and that always delayed things so. She came with her beautiful Cashmere shawl all huddled about her round shoulders, and her hair spraying out of torn places in her net, and her shabby old Adelaide boots that drove Uncle Willie nearly crazy. He wanted her to dress fashionably, and she *couldn't*, no matter how hard she tried. She used to tell Mamma she couldn't, sitting and eating a piece of cake or drinking wild cherry bounce, while the tears trickled down her cheeks.

Now, when poor Priscilla appeared, Mamma said, "Botheration!" softly, under her breath; but she didn't really mind, for Priscilla was the only one of Papa's relations who made her feel quick and clever and sure of herself; and she moved twice as briskly, with an important little frown, as soft as a wrinkle in cream, between her eyebrows, after Priscilla came.

But she had to get her out of the kitchen, for old

Chloe's puckered black face was getting crosser every minute. So they went into the conservatory to cut some flowers for Papa's welcoming.

Mamma loved her conservatory so! Papa said she loved it better than she loved him, but, of course, that was only his fun. There were the delicate drooping ferns; the blood-red foliage of the dragon-plant; the fuchsias, trained like umbrellas, all tasselled with crimson and purple, umbrellas gorgeous enough to hold over the heads of Chinese emperors. And begonias with crimson-lined, silver-spotted leaves; intense blue and purple velvet disks of cinerarias; creamy calla lilies; and the little pouches of the calceolarias, golden, crimson, maroon and rose colored, mottled and flecked —money-bags for the elves. All along one side were the spice-scented, winter-flowering carnations, with their flakes and veinings and marblings of color—yellow edged with a fringe of rose, rosy pink and carmine. *La Pureté* and *La Pureté Variée.* Mamma could never understand what Papa found funny in "Variegated Purity"; but then she couldn't understand most of the jokes that amused him, although she always gave them her gentle smile, puzzled and polite.

Snip went her scissors through the stem of a tea-rose. Snip! That was a little bit of myrtle. And then back into the parlor to arrange charming unæsthetic bouquets—rosebuds and fuchsia, an airy tendril of vine, a spray of wax-white lemon blossoms,

with glossy dark leaves—while Aunt Priscilla followed, talking in a mild steady trickle.

"So I had my new dress laid out on the bed, and that new fancy dinner-cap I got in Philadelphia, the black lace one with the magenta ribbons, all ready to surprise Willie. I meant to have them on when he came home to tea, but I got to reading a new book by that Mr. Wilkie Collins—'Sister Rose; or, The Ominous Marriage,' it's called. I read about it in Godey's. It said: 'has merit and is neatly printed,' so I knew it would be good—so anyway—what was I talking about?"

"Willie," Mamma replied. She hadn't been listening, but she knew that all Aunt Priscilla's conversation rippled around that name.

"Oh, yes, Willie!" And she said the name tenderly, as if her heart was giving it a little kiss. "Well, so I hadn't an *idea* how late it was; and the first thing I knew, there was Willie home and Henry Allen with him—come to tea—and me in my old crocheted Zouave because it was so chilly, and my hoops off. And nothing for tea but chip-beef because I told the girl I'd make some whips for dessert—she don't seem to have much success with her desserts—girls aren't what they used to be—no faculty, and inde*pend*ent! And even the green ones asking two dollars a week."

"Don't talk to me about *girls!*" cried Mamma, meaning *do.*

"And so Willie—*O-oh!*"

Priscilla's hands flew to her mouth, her mild kind eyes swam with tears, and the small nose that looked like a button in the middle of a puffy cushion flushed pink. On the floor lay the glass swan her sleeve had brushed from the table; and Mamma looking at it, felt her eyes fill with tears too. She had never thought about it much before, but, now that it was broken, it seemed to her that it had always been her favorite ornament. Poor little swan! It lay there with its fragile neck snapped right in two, with the violets old Toot had brought in from the cold-frame scattered around it, and a dark patch beside it on the crimson carpet that looked as if it had been bleeding. Yet with those pale bewildered eyes looking at her so beseechingly, she could only repeat to herself the family saying:

"Poor Priscilla means so well!"

She was dreadfully tired by the time Aunt Priscilla went home! But the parlor was decked satisfactorily for Papa's return. She loved her parlor, almost as much as her conservatory. Each fat chair was a friend, the sofa was a lover who said to her, "Come, lie in my arms." To walk on the carpet was to walk on crimson roses. Between looped-back crimson window-curtains hung cages of canaries and love-birds that she had tamed with the endless patience of indolence combined with a sweet nature, and taught to perch on her shoulder and peck at lumps of sugar held between her lips. Under the cages green iron plant-

stands held geraniums soft as butterfly wings, their velvet leaves banded with chocolate color, growing in pots covered with putty into which she had pressed acorns and little pine-cones. She had crocheted the blue and green and scarlet worsted covers for the goose-egg baskets in the windows, each holding a little bunch of flowers or a feather of fern; she had made the wax pond lilies floating on their mirror pools under glass shades. And even a picture hanging on the wall was hers—a castle on a lake, with mountains and clouds for background. The sky and water were painted; and the mountains were of gray sand; the rocks, of red sand; and a road of yellow sand, sprinkled on glue. The castle was made of white birch-bark, with its dark reddish lining used for the parts in shadow, and the windows and doors painted in with ivory black; and, springing from the moss of the foreground, were trees—bits of untwisted rope with the strands divided at the top to make the limbs. Cousin Lizzie and Aunt Priscilla had made sand-pictures, too. The directions said you could have white clouds, storm clouds, or sunset clouds, but pointed out that sunset clouds were more difficult and required more patience to paint. Mamma had been contented with white clouds, but Cousin Lizzie had done a sunset. As for poor Priscilla's, hers had ended in nothing much but glue all over everything in the house.

And now to rest!

But almost before she had settled herself on the sofa before the fire, Cousin Lizzie Blow came rustling in, wearing a new black bonnet with scarlet verbenas under the brim. Her black eyes, darting about the room, made Mamma see a curtain looped unevenly, a dead geranium leaf, and the dark patch on the carpet where the glass swan had fallen.

"I came to drive Mr. B. home—he rode over the mare he sold Victor last week. He's out in the stable-yard with old Toot; and Maggie's there too, superintending affairs, trying to stand like Mr. B. and Toot, with her legs apart and her hands behind her back. I verily believe she's such a tomboy because Victor was so frantic for a son. I do hope that he's—that you're not going to be disappointed again!"

Mamma's peach-like cheeks flushed a deeper pink, and her blue eyes looked as if they were going to fill with tears. Goodness knew she had done her best to give Victor a son! In the eleven years of their marriage she had had seven babies, and was expecting another. Victoria (named for Papa and the Queen of England, but mostly for Papa) Anna Louisa, Sophia, and Adelaide had breathed and died, and Mamma often thought of them with tears. But then she had tears for so many things that Papa never knew whether her eyes were red because she had been thinking of the lost babies, or because the sponge-cake had gone flat, or because she had been reading "Miss Proctor's lovely, darling book of poems."

What more could she do to give Victor a son than have babies and pray? Even the little girls were helping, having been taught to remind God, at the end of all their prayers, that they would like a brother. Yet Cousin Lizzie lifted her eyebrows and said, "Poor Victor!"

However, everyone knew that Lizzie Campion had been madly in love with her cousin, and had only married Sam Blow to show she didn't care when Victor married Margaret Southmayd. So Mamma, remembering, thought, "Poor Lizzie!" complacently, and felt better.

"I saw Priscilla scuttling along looking like an old peddler woman. How *can* she go about so? Willie gives her fifty times the spending money Mr. B. gives me—almost as much as Victor gives you—and what's more, she spends it, and buys elegant clothes, and yet *look* at her!"

"Poor Priscilla," Mamma murmured automatically.

"Poor Priscilla fiddle-dee-dee! Poor Willie, *I* say. You wouldn't believe how pretty she was when he married her. She said she'd been here helping you. I can imagine the help!"

Her hands flew about, pleating her little lace handkerchief, smoothing it out again, drumming a tune on the table. Her black eyes slipped this way and that.

"I suppose Victor'll be home on the four o'clock train?"

Whenever she spoke Victor's name, it was as if strong hands that she loved—his hands—took hold of her heart and twisted it. It hurt her so that some day she felt she would fall down dead of the pain, and yet she was always in a fever to say his name, over and over again; in a fever to see him, to hurt herself watching his dark ugly face with its bitter-sweet smile, and the smiling passion in his eyes when he looked at his wife.

"Yes, he wrote and said to have Toot meet him." Mamma's hand sought in her bosom for Papa's letter. She brought out the dinner menu first, but the letter was there too.

"He's been staying at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, but he went twice to Delmonico's and had turtle soup."

"Oh, I don't doubt he's had a gay time," said Cousin Lizzie, getting up and moving about the room restlessly, crushing a sprig of lemon-verbena between nervous fingers, flapping over the songs on the piano. "Have you anything new? 'Oh Let Me Shed One Silent Tear'—'Too Late, Too Late'—you *do* like merry songs, don't you, Margaret? How does this go?

> 'Not lost forever, though by fate now parted,
> Not lost forever, though we meet no more;
> They do not wander lone and broken-hearted——!'

Yes, I'm sure he's had a good time. Victor's always known how to amuse himself very well."

"He had to go on business," Mamma replied, dis-

pleased and dignified. "Very important business. He told me all about it before he went."

And he had, for although he had no illusions about his wife's mentality, he liked to talk to her about the things that interested him. He had talked to her all one evening about the business that was taking him to New York; and Mamma had said, "Yes, love," and "*Well!*" and "I'm sure you're right," when the tone of his voice seemed to call for such remarks. As a matter of fact she hadn't listened to a word, for she had been crocheting a floral card-basket that called for a great deal of counting. The bottom was a star of white on claret that shaded to violet on the border; and there were crocheted dark and light green leaves, and straw-colored poppies shading into claret and violet, all spangled with dewdrops of little glass beads. It was only by the greatest effort she had kept from counting aloud, "single chain over the last single chain under the same chain, four chain, single chain under chain before the second double chain, seven chain." Papa, kissing the top of her head, as sleek and brown as a horsechestnut under its chenille net, had assured her that it was a great relief to find that she agreed with him.

"Well, I must fly, love!" cried Cousin Lizzie. "Mr. B. will be waiting for me. 'Not lost forever, though by fate now parted——' No, not lost forever, only until dinner time!"

And at last Mamma could drop on the sofa, her

bright blue skirts swelling up around her. On the table near by, in a work-basket petticoated with pinked frills of violet and maize-colored ribbon, lay her sewing; on it lay also the book she was reading, drawn to it by the heroine's name being Margaret, just like hers. " 'Margaret, Marchioness of Miniver,' by Lady Clara Cavendish, authoress of 'Lisa, or The Mesmerist's Victim,' 'The Divorce, a Tale of Fashionable Life,' 'The Woman of the World,' etc." Perhaps, presently, she would sew a little, or read. If she read she would have to hide her book before Papa came home, for she knew he would hope to find her reading "The New Gymnastics for Men, Women, and Children," all full of dumb-bells. He was so modern and full of upsetting ideas—exercise, and air, insisting on having a window in the children's bed-room lowered an inch or two at night, although Mamma pointed out to him again and again that everyone knew the night air was injurious.

But just for the moment she only wanted to lie still.

Oh, how nice, how nice! She made little nestling motions, settling deeper on her sofa, letting comfort surround her softly. She was all soft and smooth and round—so round that she sometimes thought, but only thought, of drinking vinegar. She lay there, stretching and stirring a little at first from sheer comfort, then growing motionless; heavy and soft and white, a lady made of white velvet and stuffed with down.

Chapter Two

VICTOR CAMPION met Margaret Southmayd a few years after he graduated from Harvard, when he went to visit her brother Henry, who had been a classmate.

There had been guests in his honor on the afternoon before he went home—young men a little stand-offish and suspicious of the stranger who had so much money, and had made the "Grand Tour," and was just home from England and inclined to talk about the opening of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park; arch young ladies not at all stand-offish, tossing their ringlets and shrugging their shoulders and making "saucy" replies. There had been strawberries and cream, and croquet with tiny mallets and huge balls banded with bright colors that they sent trundling through wide wickets. The shadows grew long on the gold-green turf, and the girls' great crinolines, swinging and swaying as they bent above their balls, took on the tender colors of flowers at twilight. And through the laughter and the calling there sometimes sounded a note of sadness, though they were all so happy.

Now they were gone; and Henry had gone with them to get the mail, while Victor and Margaret collected the strawberry saucers and put the mallets and

balls to bed in their box in the dark summer-house that smelled of moss and old rotting wood.

She wanted to talk to him, to say clever things to make him laugh, as Alice and Emily had. He had been with those two all afternoon—and tomorrow he would be gone forever. But she wasn't good at beginning conversations, and she never knew where to look when his dark eyes were on her; so she kept at a little distance, turning her head away, pretending to be busy.

"Here's another ball!" he called, picking it up out of the wet pink and silver border of cinnamon pinks. And he said it as if he were telling her a tremendous and beautiful and funny secret that only they two would ever know, so that she forgot to be shy, and came smiling to his side.

In her spreading white muslin and rose-colored ribbons, she seemed to him like a slender apple-tree in blossom. He was a modern young man, but he did not like the modern girl. It was the time of the bloomer agitation, and every paper you picked up was full of caricatures of ladies, with bonnets and ringlets, to be sure, but also with trousers, bull dogs, and cigars. And there were jokes about ladies "popping the question," or if they did not ask for the gentleman's hand in marriage, at least asking for the next polka or *deux temps*. There were even jokes about colleges for women, and caricatures of professors with bloomers under their gowns and mortar-boards on top of their

lace caps. But there was nothing of the new woman about Margaret. She no more wanted equal rights than did the rose, sweet and cool in its broad fresh leaves at her belt. At the very mention of bloomers her white lids curtained her blue eyes, her cheeks grew pinker; and, when she went to church to confess her sins in her innocent voice, she wore a bonnet all rosebuds and lace instead of one of those fast round hats that were becoming so fashionable.

"See, here's a firefly," he said, and showed it to her on his finger, its little green glow shining and darkening, shining and darkening. She bent over it, showers of ringlets falling like curtains on either side of her pretty face. The dusky rose in the sky was deepening, and little pale moths were fluttering over the flowers. In the valley below them where a white mist was rising, the frogs began to call. They still stood close together, their heads bent to the firefly's small green lamp; but they had forgotten it, forgotten everything except that her whole being was crying silently, "Tomorrow we will be apart!" and his was answering, "Tonight we are together."

The night before her wedding Margaret spent in weeping. In the first place, the Southmayds were dreadfully poor, and, instead of lace, her wedding-veil beneath its orange buds would be plain illusion. And then Mrs. Southmayd had had "a little talk" with her

daughter that was as terrifying as it was unilluminating; and, after vague wide circlings about some secret so sinister that it could not be mentioned, it had ended in floods of tears on both sides.

Her trembling voice and ice-cold fingers, when they were being married, filled Victor with an anguish of love. But presently, tying on her white silk going-away bonnet, an artless advertisement with its lace veil and orange-blossoms, while her bridesmaids fluttered about her, envious and excited, and her tall, dark lover waited for her below, she grew more calm, became, in fact, complacent. And although his passionate love never seemed to her "quite nice," she returned it with placid affection.

He had fallen in love with her greatly because she was not "strong-minded"; and indeed Margaret was never what Miss Florence Nightingale called "a female ink-bottle." But, after they were married, he tried for a little while to improve her mind.

"Would you like me to read to you, darling?"

"Oh, that would be very nice!"

But first she would have to get her foot-stool, and her work from upstairs, and her little quilted jacket of rose-colored silk bordered with swansdown, in case she grew chilly. And then:

"Oh, Victor! My thimble! It's up on my toilet table!"

And she would look so helpless and appealing that

he would tear upstairs, three steps at a time, and bring it down to her.

"Now then, I really *am* ready!"

He would begin to read words that stirred the depths of his heart with their beauty:

" 'Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art——
Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night,
And watching,——' "

"Oh, Victor love! Before you get *really* into it! Tell me, if you were me, would you have field flowers on your new leghorn straw, or just a white lace veil and mauve ribbons? Field flowers *and* a lace veil would be *too* much, wouldn't they? Or *wouldn't* they?"

" 'No——yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel forever its soft fall and swell,
Awake forever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.' "

Surely she must cry "It's about us. It's just exactly like us!"

She hadn't listened to a word. The fire was so bright, her chair was so soft, and the sound of the rain on the windows made her sleepy. But when his voice stopped she rose out of her warm abstraction to make a little humming sound that meant, "How very pretty."

"Did you like it, my darling?"

"Yes, thank you, Victor. It was sweetly pretty. Oh, and just while I remember it—would you like a tipsy parson for dessert tomorrow? You hardly touched your syllabub today, and I *do* so want to please you!"

It seemed to him so touching that she should want to please him that he could have fallen at her feet to worship her. But he gave up trying to improve her mind.

He gave up trying to make her exercise her body even sooner, although on their honeymoon he had bullied and coaxed her into a bath in the ocean. She rather fancied herself in her gipsy hat and her bathing-dress, with her feet looking so white and small under the blue flannel ruffles; but going into the cold, rough water was dreadful! Walking, except for gentle ramblings about the garden, tired her, she said; and the very thought of a horse filled her with panic. As for skating, thank goodness, by the time the river froze, she knew she was going to have a baby, and could lie on her dear, soft sofa for hours and hours at a time without being urged to do anything.

So Victor went "down state" with his brother Willie and Sam Blow to shoot reedbirds, and railbirds, and ducks in the marshes, rowed across the river to fish in the New Jersey creeks, skated on the river in winter nearly up to Philadelphia, and galloped over the fields fox-hunting.

"You ought to join in Victor's pleasures more, my

dear, unless you're anxious to lose him," Lizzie Blow advised Margaret. "It's a poor plan to let a man find out how well he can amuse himself without you."

Margaret's eyes filled with tears. She *did* join in Victor's pleasures! With her own hands, she made him sandwiches of ham, home-cured in the old grey smoke-house that huddled under its mantle of heaven-blue wistaria; she ate, with cries of delight, the fat little reedbirds he shot; she patted his horses, timidly offering them apples while she tried to hide her terror at their bared teeth and jerking heads; and she saw that drinks were always ready when he and Willie and Sam came trooping in, steaming punch when they were cold and muddy, frosty mint juleps when they were hot and dusty. And it was to "The Maples" they always returned, not to "Meadowbrook," the Blows' house, nor to "Riverview," where Willie and poor Priscilla lived in expensive muddle. Remembering this helped Margaret to bear Lizzie's trying remarks with fortitude. And she would rather have died than tear around the country as Lizzie did on Sam's wildest horses, with her cheeks like fire, making such a figure of herself.

Victor had brought Margaret home to his father's house in Delaware; and two years later the elder Mr. Campion died, leaving the place to his son. She loved it, inside and out; the trees so tall they seemed to hold the sky, the gold-green lawn, the carriage sweep, and the fountain in front of the house, with its

great sheaf of white and green iron calla lilies and leaves, each lily sending up a jet of water. She loved the big grey house with its cupola and porches; the round beds of asters that were blooming when Victor brought her home, the pears that were dropping, heavy and golden from the golden sun. She loved the view of the river, blue, or slate-colored, or *café au lait*, with its sailing ships. She loved the negro servants, their soft voices and ready laughter and melancholy songs. She loved her deep carpets, the snow-drift of her bed, the delicious food that old Chloe cooked. And oh, she did love her pretty clothes, after piecing and contriving and making over her old dresses for so long! Her gowns of apple-green glacé, black velvet, mauve and primrose silk, her black lace shawl with its swirling ferns and deeply petalled edge, her white lace shawl as delicate as frost-work; her little parasols the shape and color of hyacinth bells; and the pearl and primrose tinted gloves; and small white mists of cobweb pocket-handkerchiefs, fragrant from lavender fagots.

And she loved Victor, too. She loved him very much, indeed.

As she had told him, she did so want to please him! But there was only one thing he didn't have that he wanted, and that was a son.

So kneeling in church in her best shawl and bonnet, and by the broad bed in her long-sleeved high-necked

nightgown and lace-frilled nightcap, she sent up prayers detailed as marketing lists:

"Dear God, please bless Victor and Baby" (or "Maggie and Baby," or "Maggie and May and Baby," as time went on) "and let her not have so much trouble with her teething; and bless Mamma and Papa, and bless Henry, too, but don't let him ask Victor for any more money; and make old Chloe not so cross; and make me good and make my sore throat well; and keep us in safety and happiness and give us a little boy. Amen."

Chapter Three

NOBODY could keep away from the parlor, because Papa was there, home again. Old Chloe, in a clean yellow print sprigged with scarlet and a fresh turban, brought eggnog; Albert carried in logs for the fire; and old Toot, though he knew perfectly well he had no business to, looked in to say that he was trying to teach the little yellow cow's two-day old calf to suck. As for the little girls, they couldn't get near enough to Papa. But it was to Mamma that all his being was pouring out, pouring out.

They gave him his birthday presents right away—they simply couldn't wait any longer. Mamma had embroidered him a pair of slippers—tigers! They quite frightened Lily, the tigers stared at her so, and showed such red tongues. It had been a great piece of work, calling not only for black Berlin wool, and white, and light and dark scarlet, but seven different shades of brown. And then such a question as to whether the background should be bright sky-blue or pale green. All the little girls had given their opinions.

Then she had had her own hair and theirs made into a watch-fob for him; and even that wasn't all, for old Toot had driven them to Wilmington one day to the

photographer's, and they had had their *Cartes de Visite* taken. The little girls could have spent hours gazing at their pictures, and Mamma herself took a good many looks.

Maggie had made him a small, flat silk pin-cushion, shaped like a fish, with net scales, and fins and tail of pins. It had seemed beautiful to her while she was making it—a little blue fish with silver tail and fins. She could imagine the sensation it would have made swimming among the mud-colored minnows in the brook. But now she wanted to give Papa something precious, marvelous—a milk white charger, or a ruby as big as a pigeon's egg. She wanted to do something hard, to risk her life, to lose her life for him. And instead of saying, "Happy birthday with my love, Papa dear," prettily, as Mamma had told them all to do, she almost threw her present at him, scowling dreadfully and muttering, "Here's something—I guess it's horrid."

May had made him a pin-cushion, too—it was all the little sisters could think of. But hers was a lute, with a small round spot of black velvet glued on to look like the opening, and long stitches of gold thread for the lute-strings. She and Maggie had been rather troubled because they were both giving him pin-cushions, but, fortunately, it turned out that that was exactly what Papa had been longing for.

Lily's present was an allumette stand filled with colored paper allumettes. It was of fluted wire

covered with cerise and Napoleon blue chenille, and of course, Mamma had made it, really, guiding Lily's fat little hand in the weaving of a strand or two. But Lily thought she had made it all herself, and told Papa so.

And Papa had presents for them, too—presents from New York.

"Oh, Victor love, you shouldn't have! We didn't expect *presents!*" Mamma cried, looking as pleased and excited as her little daughters.

"Oh yes, we *did*, Mamma!" protested May.

There were enamel lockets, black, with forget-me-nots, for the little sisters. They had on light blue chambray dresses, low necked, with scalloped ruffles, white muslin aprons, and their best long lace-edged drawers, and the lockets looked so pretty, tied on with long blue ribbons. And then there were three wax dolls, dressed as babies, and as pink as if they had just gotten out of boiling hot baths. Maggie thought that she would rather be chopped up into little tiny pieces than let Papa guess that she had hoped her present would be a bow and arrow.

"That's all I have for you three."

"There's another package in the hall," suggested May, in case Papa had forgotten it.

"Oh, fie, pet, don't be greedy!" Mamma reproved her, shocked.

Mamma's present was a parure of flowers; a wreath for the hair, a bouquet for the corsage, and sprays for

the skirt. They were made of cornflowers and wheat, and they came from Paris!

"Is it true that shawls are out, and everyone is wearing zou-zous?" Mamma wanted to know. But Papa hadn't noticed.

However, he had noticed lots of other things; the heavy traffic, the stages, the newsboys and apple-venders shouting in the streets. Homesick for the country, he had walked one day all the way to the Central Park, and seen the beautiful bird houses, each with its name painted on it, "City Hall," "Battery," and so on, built for the sparrows imported two or three years before from England. And at his hotel he had made the trip up to his room in the Vertical Railway, going straight up like a frog in a well-bucket.

"Oh, Victor! How dreadfully dangerous!" cried Mamma, pressing her hands above her heart and looking quite faint. "Thank goodness, we have you safely back!"

"I wouldn't be afraid to ride in the Vertical Railway," Maggie boasted, but May copied Mamma, pressing her hands to her apron bib and crying, "Oh, Papa! I'd have been frightened to death!"

Papa had brought home some new music, "Dream on, Lillie," and "If Thou hast Crushed a Flower," a duet called "Home of My Youth," and two humorous songs, "The Girls are not so Green" and "What they do at the Springs."

"I hope they're not *too* comical, love," said Mamma, remembering one called "Skedaddle" that had been.

They tried over the duet together.

"'Home of youth! all thy pleasures
Are impressed on my heart——
Ere they fade from my mem'ry
Life itself must depart.'"

Oh, beautiful voices, rising and falling together! May had taken her new doll to the kitchen to show Chloe and Martha, and Lily had trotted after her; but Maggie leaned against Papa, weak and heavy with love, feeling through all her body his kind, careless hand on her shoulder.

"'In the land of the stranger,
Sighs and tears are but mine——'"

Mamma sang the heart-broken words in a voice like the chirping of a contented canary, and Papa's voice swelled out, jubilant, triumphant:

"'Sighs and tears are but mine!'"

and he looked at her, smiling, forgetting Maggie, forgetting everything but Mamma.

"How have you been, my darling?"

"Nicely, thank you, Victor."

"Margaret, Margaret——!"

"Sam brought over your new horse," she said quickly, smiling and embarrassed.

"I must go out and have a look at her. I'm afraid

I shouldn't have bought her, Margaret—my business didn't turn out quite as well as I thought it was going to."

"Oh, but you wanted that horse so much! I'll save some way—I'd rather fix up my old hoops and make them do another year than have you go without!"

How funny and sweet and touching she was! He loved her so that he could hardly bear it.

"Margaret—I have something to show you——"

It was in the big parcel in the hall—how had he ever gotten it home in the steam-cars? When the paper fell away, there pranced a rocking-horse, so bright, so freshly painted that it was still a little sticky, dappled grey and white, with wide scarlet nostrils.

"For the baby!"

"For *Lily?*" But she knew he didn't mean for Lily. Her head drooped, her eyelids fell. She was dreadfully embarrassed.

"No—for our little boy."

They all went out on the lawn to see Papa try the new mare. The sky was full of ragged clouds, streaming and free, and the river was covered with whitecaps. How the wind blew! It sent the water from the iron calla lilies streaming to one side in thin veils, it banged the shutters, it blew the little girl's skirts so that you could see their drawers up to their waists. They jumped up and down, wild with excitement, and they could feel their new lockets jumping too, tap, tap.

"That's a beautiful mare!" screamed Cousin Lizzie to Mamma, trying to make herself heard above the wind. The Blows had come as Papa was trotting down the road, and stood with Mamma on the steps watching him galloping back.

"Full of spirits—nervous as a witch!" Cousin Sam shouted. "That's the kind Victor likes."

Papa tore into the driveway, Trusty yelping behind him, and flung up a welcoming hand to them just as the wind caught a little white shawl from his wife's shoulders and flung it flapping into the mare's face. As she swerved with a great buck, he shot into the air and fell head-first on the road.

"God, his neck's broken!" Sam Blow cried: and Lizzie began to scream, thin and high above the wind, like a rabbit in a trap. But no one paid any attention to her, for Margaret had gone crumpling down onto the steps.

In the last hour of Victor Campion's birthday his son was born.

Chapter Four

ONE of the cherry trees in the garden was dead, and over it grew a wistaria vine, lavendar-blue, a heaven-colored tent. The long sprays of flowers fell down like a curtain, the light that came through was stained a lovely color, and there was a lavender-blue carpet of fallen petals on the grass. The bees in the wistaria made a sound like the sound in a sea-shell, only louder, but they never bothered the little girls. Old Toot said they wouldn't, and they didn't.

"Dem bees ain' gwine bodder you, 'outen you bodder dem."

Black Susannah brought the baby out, lying on his pillows in the big wash-basket, and left him under the wistaria where his sisters were playing. Fat little Lily tried to give him some of her bread and butter and sugar, poking it at his mouth, and he lifted his feeble voice in a mewing cry.

"*Lily!*" cried Maggie, outraged and important. "Naughty! You *mustn't* give Baby things to eat! Was he frightened, then? Did he want his Maggie?"

She knelt by the basket smiling at little Victor; and in her old brown dress, with her thin face gentle and bright with love, she looked like the youngest shepherd, kneeling to worship the Baby who lay in a manger.

May came and knelt on the other side, putting out a finger for the tiny groping fist to close around.

"Look! He's holding on to me! He loves me best because he knows I love him best!"

"You do not love him best!"

May affected not to hear, but said to the baby in a high small voice, copying Mamma and Aunt Priscilla:

"*Did*dun he know I loved him besty, besty, best? *Did*dun he then? He says, 'yes,' *he* knew!"

"You do not love him best!"

"I do so!"

"I love him best because I'm oldest, so now, miss! And, if you ever say I don't, I'll knock you down!"

Lily didn't understand about the baby.

"Did Papa bring him from New York?" she asked; for she remembered the big parcel in the hall the day Papa came home. She and May had picked a tiny hole in the wrapping paper, feeling dreadfully guilty and as nervous as two mice, until suddenly a large eye stared out at them and they had fled in terror. It might have been the baby.

"Yo' ma find him in de ga'den undeh a cu'ant bush," Chloe told them; but May and Lily had looked for babies among the currant bushes every day since, and hadn't found one, so they were beginning to doubt it. Aunt Priscilla said Dr. Chase had brought him in his bag; and Cousin Jennie Blodgett, who stayed with them while Mamma was ill, and let them dress up in her bonnet and shawl, and made them cup-custards that

they didn't like very much but ate politely, told them the stork had brought him, and showed them the stork's picture in "Hans Andersen."

Mamma said God had sent an angel with the baby to comfort them because Papa had gone to heaven.

There seemed to be a difference of opinion among the authorities.

Maggie was inclined to believe the Dr. Chase theory, for she had seen him go into Mamma's room with his black bag; and later, lying awake on a tear-soaked pillow, she had first heard that little mewing cry. But, since Mamma thought it was God and an angel, she wasn't going to tell her it was only Dr. Chase.

They thought at first little Victor would slip away like Victoria, Anna Louisa, Sophia and Adelaide. He was so tiny, so weak. Wrinkled and red as a poppy-bud, he lay wrapped in warm blankets, slept, woke to weep, and slept.

"We will both go to Victor," said Mamma pathetically, propped among her pillows, while her tears fell into her bowl of arrowroot.

"Try just a *spoon*ful of the wine jelly, love!" begged Cousin Jennie, with tears on her own cheeks.

"How can you ask me, Jennie?" Mamma's eyes reproached her.

"For little Victor's sake!"

For little Victor's sake, she tried; and presently, somehow, the saucer was empty.

For little Victor's sake, they would all do anything. He was the center of the household, the center of the universe. In April, a great fleet sailed down the river; further south battles were fought; presently summer added its heat to the fever that burned in the prisons; the sun set in melting pink and gold; the stars shone in the sky; but these things were unnoticed. Victor sneezed his first tiny sneeze like a kitten's; he smiled his first smile; he was carried to church in his high-waisted, puff-sleeved christening robe that Mamma had embroidered all over with incredibly tiny flowers and leaves, and was given his father's name. He was the man of the house, and his women surrounded him, worshipping.

Uncle Willie tried to explain the state of Papa's financial affairs to Mamma.

"Do you mean we're *paupers?*"

"No, no!" Good heavens, was she going to cry again? "You're very well-to-do, only Victor didn't leave as much as I expected him to. The war's hit us both; though nothing to compare to any number of others."

"But I don't see how the war concerns us—we haven't any slaves." For Victor's grandfather had freed his slaves by manumission long before, though they had gone on living with the family, and were buried, when they died, at the feet of their masters and mistresses in the family burying-ground.

"Well—there are other considerations," said Uncle

Willie, prudently skipping on. "But the point is, you won't be able to go on quite as you have been going. Have you any idea what you've been spending a year?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand anything about figures," Mamma replied complacently.

"No, ladies aren't to be expected to. But, of course, you'll want to be near your father and mother now, and a smaller house would make a great difference."

"Oh, no, Willie! I could never leave The Maples."

"But it's a big place, and expensive to keep up."

"Dearest Victor would wish us to stay," said Mamma with placid finality. It was her answer to everything. "Dearest Victor would wish it," or "Dearest Victor wouldn't," and simply meant "I will" or "I won't."

"God give me patience!" Uncle Willie cried within himself; and he thought quite kindly of Aunt Priscilla, who at least knew she didn't know anything.

"We can economize in so many ways, now that darling Victor's gone," Mamma said through her pocket handkerchief, when Willie's conscientious floods of figures ceased. "The meat bills will be *nothing!* Gentlemen have such hearty appetites. But I'm sure I don't care if I never see a roast of beef again—just a little dish of creamed sweetbreads now and then, and we have our own chickens. And *clothes!* The price of a gentleman's top hat alone! And, perhaps, I might possibly let Susannah go—she's

very lazy. I don't know what girls are coming to nowadays," she added, but absently, not receiving or expecting an answer. She had said it so often, and would say it so often again.

"But Victor wouldn't want me to give up the conservatory, or the horses and carriages. And I suppose, after all, the children should have roast beef—and Susannah *is* very fond of the baby."

"Well, you'll still save on poor old Victor's hats," said Uncle Willie sardonically.

"Oh, yes! And coats as well, and waistcoats and—and other things." She blushed brightly. She had nearly said "trousers" to a gentleman.

"The woman's a fool," he thought, though not with any shock of discovery. But the May day was warm and beautiful, the lilies of the valley growing beside the porch sent up their perfume, and Mamma looked pretty and appealing, though plump, in her black dress and little white crêpe "Marie Stuart" bonnet, so that presently, his nose buried in mint and the frost thick on his glass, he was thinking indulgently, "Poor little woman!"

Chapter Five

THE baby wailed and drooped through the heat of his first summer; but, when Mamma cut long sprays of pungent chrysanthemums for the brass vases that stood on the altar to the glory of God and in memory of Mary Clarissa Campion, when burrs pattered down from the chestnut trees, and the frost touched the persimmons with orange and vermilion, he grew stronger, looked about him with interest, and presently was amiably plunging from outstretched hands to outstretched hands.

Other events beside Victor's first steps, his first words, his teething, and his whooping-cough took place, though none seemed so important. Trains grew on to dresses, and crinolines were full at the bottom instead of the top, so that ladies turned from tulips to morning glories. Pamela bonnets, like saucers with strings, became so fashionable that even Mamma, who prided herself on being conservative, succumbed; although she only wore hers in the carriage, considering it far too conspicuous and coquettish to wear when she was on foot. Lizzie Blow stopped going to church and took up Spiritualism, tipped tables, and asked for one loud rap if "yes," two if "no." One day, when the stars were full of portent, the Prince and Princess

of Wales were married in London and old Toot died in his whitewashed cabin under the weeping willow. His place was taken by Caesar, who, under Mamma's direction, planted ribbon borders and the fashionable new pin-cushion beds here and there about the place; and two new iron urns on the terrace boiled over with petunias and sent up jets of ornamental grass. In winter, when she could not be among her flowers, Mamma learned new stitches in knitting and crochet, and everything in the house became covered with woolwork as things in damp countries are covered with mould—even the bird cages dripped crochet borders. And, when she was not busy with other things, she wound bandages and felt badly about the war—almost as badly as she felt about Victor's croup and the naughty way in which Lily had taken to stealing sugar.

Terrible and stirring names sounded through those days, piercing even her dreamy mistiness, the Seven Days' Battles, Fredericksburg and Gettysburg, Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge, the Battle of the Wilderness. Her eyes would brim over with tears, and whispering, "Oh, the poor mothers!" she would catch her son to her breast.

The soldiers went south past The Maples, on foot, by train, or sailing down the river in great fleets of many-masted schooners. The sails of the full-rigged ships swelling in the wind, shining in the sun, stirred the heart and made war wonderful and romantic; but the tired men plodding past in clouds of

dust on the road were different. Looking at them, the bugle-calls sounded faintly, the glory dimmed, and pity filled the heart. The little girls watched them from behind the hedge, and once Lily thought she saw Papa marching past, and ran out to him. But she got mixed up in the marching legs and knew she was lost forever until a kind soldier with a grey mustache picked her up, smudged the dust and tears on her face with a hand as spiritually gentle as it was physically rough, and swung away to become one of those countless tiny figures fighting together against the infinite and dramatic background of space, stars, thunder, and eternity or annihilation.

The talk of war was everywhere—monitors, the draft, buying substitutes. Between North and South, they felt pressure from both sides. Mr. Brown was ridden on a rail by masked men—which side were they on? No one knew. Cousin Willie, supposed to have southern sympathies, was threatened with tarring and feathering, but so was that violent Yankee, Mr. Farley. The war charged the air, changing everything, giving everything an excitement, an emotional tensity. Wellington Carter was being stupid at the store, breaking the candles and dropping the change on the floor—and before the candles all were burned he was being buried at Mount Pleasant with military honors. Sorrow was the common state, and boys who had marched away to fife and drum came home by the streets of silence.

"Thank God, Victor is a baby!" Mamma cried, listening to the church bell tolling. "And after all the suffering this one has brought, surely, surely, there'll never be another war!"

The war was like distant thunder; threatening, warning, although the sun shone on the still garden. But it was Maggie in whose heart it echoed loudest.

Aunt Priscilla bought one of the new green-grey Rogers' groups, and put it in the bay window along with the draggled lace curtains, the hanging baskets of sick ferns, and the parrot in his dirty cage; and Maggie would steal in to look at it, aflame with pity for the wounded scout, wandering in the swamp supported by a ragged negro. So sick, so sick, the veins standing out terribly on his arm under a tourniquet. Once, when no one was near, she touched her lips softly, quickly to that tortured hand, while a wordless passion flooded her to help—she didn't know how, she didn't know who—just to help. It was only her adoration of her little brother that kept her from running away and trying to enter the army disguised as a drummer boy.

Then one April day, when Caesar was showing the children a nest of blue eggs in a hawthorn tree and Mamma was admiring her tulips, Uncle Willie rode over to tell them President Lincoln had been assassinated.

It was like a sad, exciting story in a book to them, it was not reality. Their world was The Maples;

and the road, the river, the yellow day-lilies in the tall wet grass along the meadow fence, marked the world's ends.

Year after year, the frogs thrilled out their song, the ferns uncurled their woolly balls, the sweet rain fell, and summer came, just as if Papa had not died. Mamma was so happy with the children, the garden, the lawn, gold-green in the summer sunshine, the golden lazy days. She would never admit, never even realize consciously that his death meant a strain removed; but even his loss, dimmed by a few years, added to the perfection and harmony of her days like minor chords of music.

Her black crêpes melted into violet muslins; less and less often she said to the awed and solemn little girls, "You *do* remember dear Papa, don't you, darlings?" More and more often the cornucopia, held before his picture by a bronze hand in a neatly fluted cuff, was empty of its pansies (for thoughts). Nothing was left of his passion, his jokes, his funny songs, his sudden flashing tempers, his love—nothing but a sigh, and a few tears from Mamma on a wet day, when the children or the servants had been tiresome or when she had a headache; his watch-pocket still hanging over the big bed in her room; and Maggie's missing him.

Sometimes it seemed as if Maggie were the only one who ever thought of Papa now. But someone else remembered.

Poor Aunt Priscilla needed matches and cheese from the store, so she stood at her back door and feebly called towards the stable:

"Washington! Oh, Washington!"

But Washington, fat and black as a blackbird too fat and old to fly, felt the afternoon was over-hot for a drive, and remained where he was, comfortably hidden, mimicking his mistress under his breath:

"Wash'n'ton! Oh, Wash'n'ton!"

So Aunt Priscilla started on foot for the store, trailing her magenta draperies through the dust, her face turning from mauve to purple as she plodded along. She was thinking she would have to give up and sit down in the ditch in the shade by the side of the road, when Cousin Lizzie Blow in her little low pony carriage came rolling along in a cloud of dust, and picked her up.

"You'll have a stroke if you don't take care," she said, her eyes slipping over Priscilla's wet purple face, the point lace collar pinned on all crooked, and the lunch crumbs nested in the folds of her bodice. She herself was exquisitely neat. Her black and scarlet looked as impossible to disarrange or dim as the black and scarlet of a ladybug; and she was cool-looking, too, except for her red cheeks, one a little redder than the other, almost as red as the poppy-colored Cashmere of her Garibaldi bodice.

"What on earth are you walking for on such a day, with your stable full of horses?"

"I wanted some cheese—the mice are so bad and Willie likes it, too—me, but it's hot!" She mopped her face with a worked collar she had snatched up, mistaking it for a handkerchief. "I couldn't find Washington—I guess he was busy somewhere, and I don't like to stop him. He says the work's almost too much for him anyway. Wasn't last night awful? I couldn't stay in bed—I sat by the window and fanned myself until after two. Willie says it was the hottest night in ever so long."

"Was it? I didn't notice."

"Didn't *notice!* Why, what ever were you doing?"

"I was talking to Victor."

"Precious little fellow!"

"Oh, he seems a right nice little boy in spite of the way they spoil him—too bad his ears stick out so dreadfully. Margaret ought to do something. But I don't mean him. I mean his father. He was speaking to me last night."

Aunt Priscilla gave such a start she nearly went over the side of the pony carriage into the dusty yarrow. Of course, she knew about Lizzie's spiritualism—but she hadn't mentioned it for ever so long—and *this*—oh, *dear!*

"He talks to me every night. It all began with the table tipping—don't you remember the afternoon you did it with me?"

Did she remember? Could she ever forget? She hadn't slept for nights afterwards, and she had been

almost afraid to go to church on Sunday, for fear God would strike her dead for being a necromancer. And Cousin Lizzie told her that was nothing to what the table had done afterwards, when she was alone. Aunt Priscilla had a vision of it running after Cousin Lizzie like a little dog, leaping up and down stairs on its mahogany legs and three claw feet, rapping out dreadful messages. Willie and Priscilla had gone to see the Blows one evening, and, when Lizzie set out home-made wine and sponge-cake on that table, Priscilla nearly had hysterics. She would as soon have eaten sponge-cake off a coffin. When they went home, she poured out the whole story to Willie in a flood of tears, and it was bliss to hear his shouts of laughter and to be told that they hadn't been wicked, only a pair of fools. Still, she never liked to be in the room with that table, and as for playing solitaire on it, as Lizzie did——!

"At first I had to have things—the table, and raps to spell out messages—but he speaks right to me now, since I've learned how to listen."

She smiled to herself, thinking of the coming night, with her husband asleep and the whole house still. She would get up and go softly out of the room, out of the house, and lying on the cool grass, looking up at the pale gleaming locust trees, she would make herself empty as she had learned to do—empty, to receive him.

"Oh, goodness!" Aunt Priscilla crammed the collar

against her mouth and looked as if she were going to cry. "*Goodness*, Lizzie, ain't you scared to death? Do you *see* him?"

"I feel him," Lizzie said, smiling again her secret smile, and a little shudder of ecstasy went through her.

"Well, but—oh, gracious! Do you suppose it really can be him? You'd think he'd go to Margaret if he went to anyone——"

Cousin Lizzie said nothing, flicking a horse-fly from the pony's twitching flank.

"Does she know?"

"I don't intend to tell her. You see, he never speaks of her." Her voice was chanting, triumphant.

Aunt Priscilla felt ready to faint. What a relief to draw up before the store, to see Mr. Trewhitt hobbling down the ferny steps to take their orders and tell them it was a hot day, to drink the cold spring water he brought them.

Lizzie hardly spoke on the way home, except to say casually, "Oh, by the way, you needn't repeat what I told you to Willie or Mr. B.—men are so funny," and to mention that she was going to put up her brandied peaches tomorrow. But poor Aunt Priscilla felt as if she had been for a ride with a witch on her broom-stick!

Chapter Six

"WHAT is thy duty towards thy neighbor?" asked Miss Hessie Farley, brushing a bluebottle fly away from her nose; and the children chorused:

"My duty toward my Neighbor is To love him as myself an todotoallmenasIwouldtheyshudountome. To lovonoransuccor my father and mother. To honornobey the civil authority. To sumit myselto all my governors teachers spiritchal pastors an masters——"

"*Z-zzzzzz-ZZ-zz*" the bluebottle droned. Miss Hessie's jaw set and her eyes watered as she tried to keep from yawning. A field sloped up like a curtain in front of the Sunday school door, its drifts of daisies dazzlingly white in the sunshine.

"What is the inward and spiritual grace?"

And the children, bored and docile, told her:

"A death unto sin an' a new birth unto righteousness for beinby nature born in sin and the childerna frath——"

The little Campions saw their carriage go lurching and rocking past the Sunday school door down the steep rutty lane that led to the carriage sheds. Caesar always drove Mamma to church a little early, so that she would have time to fill the brass vases that stood on the altar in Grandmother's memory. Grandfather

had built the church, that looked, on its steep hillside, like a big brown hen sitting on its egg of Sunday school room. The reredos was sacred to his memory, the altar cross to Papa's. The lectern was so that no one should forget Great-Aunt Clementina, and the big chair by the altar, with its inlaid cross of olive-wood beads from the Mount of Olives was to remind everyone of Greatgrandfather.

"Blow your nose, honey," Maggie whispered to little Victor. "Blow!" She seized his nose gently in her handkerchief, and he obediently blew, his absent eyes fixed on the shimmer of daisies. May and Lily were in Aunt Priscilla's class, and Victor should have been with the littlest children who were being told so earnestly by Mrs. Trewhitt, the storekeeper's wife, about the Infant Moses, but he had wept so on his first Sunday that he had been allowed ever since to sit with Maggie.

The three girls had on plaid silk dresses of blue and cream and brown, and little straw hats tilted over their eyes, with blue streamers hanging down behind; they each carried a prayer-book with a sprig of shrub and a clean handkerchief between the leaves; their handkerchiefs for use were in their pockets. Victor's light blue jacket had white silk braid all around the edges, laid on in loops, as if someone had been practicing writing letter *l's*.

When Sunday school was over they trooped up to church, and sat in their pew with Mamma, good,

but inexpressibly bored. They rather enjoyed the hymns and singing, "We Praise Thee, O God," and there was always the hope that a dog might stray in or the boy who pumped the organ bellows might grow dreamy and let the air out; but these distractions weren't to be counted on, and oh, the weariness, the long exhaustion of the lessons and the sermon.

They couldn't have stood it, if they hadn't had their own private diversions. Maggie watched herself doing the most wonderful things on the cross-beams, running along them over the heads of the congregation, hanging from them by her toes, leaping from one to another. May went on with the endless story she was always telling herself. She was the beautiful princess who had just been locked up in a tall tower on an island in the middle of the sea; the prince would rescue her, but he would have his own troubles doing it. Lily looked for the faces made by patches of damp on the dark raspberry-red walls and pale sea-green ceiling. As for Victor, he leaned against the well-filled smoothness of Mamma's lilac silk senorita-body, looked at his shoes stuck straight out in front of him, looked at the lozenges of colored glass at the top of each pointed casement window—red sky and leaves, green, purple, yellow, and blue as bright and dark as bluing. Then he yawned, and looked at the altar cross that, as he looked, blurred into a dazzle of light, came swimming out to him, then faded into darkness.

When church was over, they couldn't get into the

carriage and drive right home, for Mamma had to talk with people like Miss Hessie Farley and Mr. and Mrs. Almond, and speak pleasantly to people like Mrs. Trewhitt and Miss Perry, the seamstress. They told each other what a lovely day it was, but how hot—quite unseasonable. Mrs. Almond said Mamma's lilac bonnet, with its white crushed roses under the brim, was sweetly becoming; Miss Hessie said she was having a new postillion-coat made of that very shade, but couldn't decide on the shape of the buttons—did they think the Egyptian fashion was going to take? Because if so, she would have triangular buttons, like the Pyramids, but one didn't want to be extreme. Mr. Almond said it was a fine year for cherries, if the robins didn't get them all. Miss Martin, the organist, hurried out of church with her music under her arm, small and grey and whiskered like a mouse, and squeaked "good-mornings." And Mrs. Almond, and Mrs. Trewhitt, and Miss Perry, and Miss Martin, and all the other ladies, spoke to little Victor in the small, lilting voices children endure with such patient disdain.

Lunch on Sundays was cold, to save the servants. There was Saturday's roast-beef, and bread and butter, and then a great tin pan of solidified sour milk, slippy and pale, called "bonny-clabber," and eaten unenthusiastically with cream and sugar. The little girls didn't like it, but Mamma said, "Eat it up," so they ate it up. But Victor wouldn't, so he had apple jelly.

Mamma said he was delicate and his appetite must be tempted.

After lunch Mamma took a nap, and the children went into the garden with their Sunday books. The week-day books were all put away, together with the dolls, the cup and ball, the battledore and shuttlecock. There were no games on Sunday, no excitements except when something happened like the first crocus or the first snowstorm. Funny that God didn't seem to understand that exciting things mustn't happen on Sundays.

Maggie had " 'Blind Lillias; or, Fellowship with God. A Tale for the Young.' By A Lady," and May had " 'Arthur and Marion's Sundays,' by Mrs. Bradley and Miss Neeley." The two youngest looked at the pictures in their Old Testament story-book, terrifying pictures—brazen serpents, and fathers about to sacrifice their little boys. And Trusty lay panting across their feet, hot and heavy. They were all heavy and depressed, with Sunday surrounding them like an invisible bell shutting out the air. Even the garden looked different. The beech-tree that was their playhouse on week days knew that the dolls and the little thick white china tea-set were put away; the apple tree knew it wasn't to be climbed; and the pansies and feather-ball poppies seemed to be saying, "Go away, children, we can't play today."

But Monday morning! Monday morning! Oh, the cool touch of the dew-wet grass on little bare feet!

The box hedges were covered with soaking cobwebs; the heavy dawn-pink peonies pearled with dew held showers for whoever shook them. In the kitchen shed Martha washed the clothes, rainbow-colored suds, foaming up around her dark arms, singing, and sounding as happy as if she would burst—

> " 'Nobody knows de trouble Ah've seen,
> Nobody knows but Jesus.
> Nobody knows de trouble Ah've seen,
> Glory Hallelujah!' "

The children went tearing over the lawn, and Trusty circled yelping around them, mad with delight.

The Circus had passed in the night—there were the elephant's footprints in the dust of the road! Little Victor, hands on knees, squatted to look at them in solemn rapture.

"Let's play circus!" cried Maggie. "I choose to be elephant!"

"No, I choose to be elephant," said Lily, but she knew they wouldn't let her be.

"I choose to be effalunt!"

"No, Victor, you can't be, you're too little."

Victor wept. He was young, but he had learned how to rule his women.

But, when he was elephant, he didn't know what to do. He just stood still. So they gave up having a

circus, and went to play house under the beech-tree. The beech-tree spread its branches like a cool tent, and under it was dark moss and between its grey toes little ferns came up.

Chloe had let them bake on Saturday, so there was real food to put on the heavy little china plates today, four baked dough mice with currant eyes, grimy grey and hard as rock. They resisted the children's teeth and put up a brave fight when hammered between two stones. And Maggie had a candle and a match in her pocket, to bake a winter pear over. It was horrid, all smoky and black, but she made them eat it.

Maggie was busy trying to break up one of the currant-eyed mice, and May lay flat on her back and wouldn't play properly. But Lily and Victor and Chloe's little black granddaughter Lossie, with whom they might play in the garden but not in the house, talked together politely.

"How do you do, Mrs. Jackson?"

"Howdo, Mis' Jackson."

"You mustn't call me Mrs. Jackson, too, Lossie. *You're* Mrs. Jackson."

"What-all mus' Ah call you?"

"Well, let's see. I guess you better call me Mrs. Featherby. Go on, Lossie. Say how do you do, Mrs. Featherby. You say it too, Victor honey."

"How do do, Mrs. Featherby."

"Howdo, Mis' Featherby, Ah done thought Ah'd come to dinnah."

"Oh, I'm *so* glad you did. Is this your *dear* little boy?"

"No-o *ma'am*, dis yeah's mah husban'. He's a right well-off genelmun. How is you-alls chillun?"

"Well, they all have scarlet fever today. This is my little girl."

"No, I'm not," said May. "I'm not playing." She lay on her back pretending the quivering green light falling through the beech leaves was green sea-water, and that she was lying down, down at the bottom of the sea. She was always pretending that she was under the water.

She loved Mamma's room better than any place else in the world. She loved the pale grey wall paper with its pattern of whiffs of white lace caught up by moss-rosebuds; the broad bed; the ruffled pin-cushion like a great white water-lily; the amber glass slipper; the brown china trunk for matches; and the great rainbow splashes that Mamma's crystal-stoppered perfume bottles spattered about the room. And Mamma's clothes had an irresistible attraction for her—velvet jackets with small gold hanging buttons, some in the form of bells, some of pears or flowers; boots topped with bands of fur or pheasant feathers; lavender gloves; and the fashionable new satin ribbons studded with small gold flies. But trying on a velvet *sortie de bal*, or tipping a frilled sunshade over her shoulder in front of Mamma's bureau with all its jutting

shelves, she would be drawn into the deep, dim mirror, faintly green, and see herself, a little mermaid, through sea water. On the bureau stood a small house made of shells. That was the Sea-King's palace in Hans Andersen.

"In the deepest spot of all stands the sea-king's palace; its walls are of coral, and its tall pointed windows of the clearest amber, while the roof is made of mussel shells, that open and shut according to the tide. And beautiful they look; for in each shell lies a pearl, anyone of which would be worthy to be placed in a queen's crown."

How May loved the story! She thought of the marble statue of the handsome youth, standing on bright blue sands in the dancing violet shadows cast by a red weeping willow through whose branches the fishes swam. She was the little mermaid swimming deep, deep in the sea—swimming around that beautiful statue, swimming up through the water while the silver bubbles streamed behind her—up to see and to love the young prince who would never love her.

The fairy-tale house that interested greedy little Lily more was the ginger-bread house in "Hansel and Gretel." Good little cakes, and almonds on the roof!

Maggie considered herself too old for fairy tales. Her favorite book was "The White Chief; a Story of New Mexico," by Mayne Reid, and she sternly made the others act it out when they were longing to tie grass sashes around the waists of hollyhock dolls, or beat up

mud chocolate puddings—or anything rather than be scalped with the trowel from the potting-shed.

As for Victor, he couldn't read much of anything yet, although he could point out *V* for Victor and *C* for Campion in the alphabet book.

Chapter Seven

GENTLY the Campions slipped from being rich to being "well-to-do," from being "well-to-do" to being "comfortable," and from being "comfortable" to "having to be just a little careful." Mamma didn't understand it, but remained placid and bought seal-skin sacques and muffs for herself and her daughters, for certainly they had to be kept warm somehow; and, not until after the fur coats were bought, did it occur to her that she might have knitted them all hug-me-tights to wear under their cloaks.

There was a continual trickle of new trifles for herself, a coral colored peplum, fringed with jet, a fanchon bonnet like a velvet dish of currants, a few new braids and puffs, or a straw embroidered white tulle veil. And, for the children, there were Roman sashes, worked petticoats, red and white flannel sailor-suits, embroidered with anchors. These things didn't count, and as for the larger purchases, the walking costumes and carriage costumes (both used for the same purpose by Mamma), the wine-colored curtains for the dining-room, and Prince, the new pony for Victor, she bought those only because something (not rappings or tipping tables) seemed to tell her that her husband would have wished her to have them.

Besides, she saved—ever so much. All the horses but Stella and old Charlie were sold. The wine bills were nothing compared to what they had been when Papa was alive; as for ball-growns, she hadn't been to a ball since she became a widow; and, although she had been unable to resist one confection of arsenic green satin and gold wheat, it billowed alone of its kind in her wardrobe.

Cousin Lizzie Blow thought it was outrageously extravagant of Mamma to have a pair of ear-rings painted with Trusty's head. Of course, everyone was having ear-rings with dogs, but only the very rich were having their own pets, and most people were quite content with fancy dogs. She was herself. But Mamma said *Mercy!* she would have felt too funny with strange dogs in her ears. And Cousin Lizzie had such queer ideas, anyway—she had given up bonnets entirely, and taken to wearing a hat like a muffin with a wing stuck on one side just as if she were an unmarried young lady. Cousin Lizzie said to everybody that Margaret Campion was so extravagant and self-indulgent she would certainly end in the Poor House, and Mamma, all aglow, said how sad it made her to see Lizzie making herself so fast-looking and conspicuous; so the two were about even.

Willie and Priscilla had also slipped from wealth to "enough to get on with perfectly nicely." After serious talks from Willie and frantic endeavors to count up, that looked as if she were doing five-finger

exercises, Mamma, in panic, would do something drastic, have crumb-pudding three days running, or cut up her best mantle to make a suit for Victor.

Now and then, with pain in her heart, she sold a bit of land. Willie had sold a lot of his. Slowly the tide of the outside world began to creep in around the islands of The Maples and Riverview.

The Blows had prospered. Sam always had a reputation for being "smart and sharp." But what good was his money, when he and Lizzie were so unhappy? He shut himself up in his room almost every evening now; but, if anyone called, he would come out, walking carefully and talk a great deal, very distinctly, asking questions that had just been fully answered, and telling anecdotes to the people who had just told them to him. And Cousin Lizzie would sit looking at him, looking and looking, with eyes as bright as if red lamps were burning behind them, and never say a word.

One way that Mamma had saved was by teaching her daughters herself. Sitting around the dining-room table, they read, "spoke pieces" whose pathos reduced Lily to pleasurable tears, and did sums with a doubtfulness and wildness shared by their teacher. But these lessons would never do for Victor. He was to go to the Rectory, where Mr. Page had a school for little boys, and presently to the Academy in town —a trip in the steam-cars every day! He could hardly wait! And finally to Harvard, like Papa.

He stood in the hall of The Maples on the hot September morning of his first day of school, while his women circled around him and Caesar, with Stella hitched into the dearborn, waited at the front door. He had all new clothes for school. Loose trousers coming below his knees were buttoned with big china buttons to his full-sleeved white shirt, and over white stockings he wore heavy laced boots. He had to stick out a foot every now and then and have a good look. He was terribly proud of his boots, the soles were so thick.

One hand held a round straw hat with a blue ribbon; the other his new satchel, containing a slate, and two of Chloe's molasses cookies to eat at the eleven o'clock recess. He felt grown-up, important, and a little confused.

"May, pet, will you just run up to Mamma's room and get the little black fan from the table by her bed?" said Mamma, dropping on to the horsehair-covered sofa, and fanning herself with her lace pocket-handkerchief. She was going to take Victor to school, this very first morning. "Oh, Lily, his pencil! In the red glass pitcher on the sideboard—well, then, in the bowl where the nutcrackers are. Mercy, child, you'd be a good person to send looking for trouble! Maggie, you might just slip down cellar, and see if you can't find a nice pear for him to take."

That was Mamma's way—to make things sound easy by saying "just." "You might just make an

angel cake, Chloe," she would suggest; or, to one of the children, "Will you just slip over to Aunt Priscilla's with this pat of butter?"

Downright Maggie resented it, resented, too, Mamma's honey-sweet voice asking, "Don't you want to help Martha dust the parlor? Don't you want to pick strawberries this morning?" Maggie would do as she was told, but she resented having to say that she wanted to.

"I don't want you to do it at all unless you do it willingly," Mamma would say, her blue eyes wet. But what she really meant, though not in words, hardly with conscious feeling, was, "You must do as I wish, and say you want to, no matter whether you do or not, and then everyone—I—will be happy and comfortable."

It wasn't fair.

The clock on the stairs struck nine, which meant that it was half past eight. When it was nine it would whirr and strangle; and at half past nine it would strike ten. Once you got used to it, it was quite easy to follow.

The sisters ran up and down stairs, their rust-brown skirts whisked through the doorways on last scampering errands; and Mamma and Victor got into the carriage. Her claret-colored draperies rose, billowed, spread, engulfed him like the waves of the Red Sea engulfing a very small Egyptian. Caesar gathered up the reins, and they rolled off, while

Maggie, May, and Lily, admiring and envious, waved as if the carriage and Stella were a ship and the turnpike was the broad blue sea.

Old Mr. Page was tying up his dahlias that the wind had blown over in the night, when the carriage drew up at the Rectory. He was a dreamy old man with long, silky silver hair, who was supposed to be a splendid teacher because he preached sermons full of Greek and Latin, and wrote beautiful poems about "Friendship" and "Nature," signed "Rusticus," that sometimes appeared in the "Poets' Corner" of the Wilmington newspaper. He tried hard to be a good teacher whenever he remembered that he had a school; but sometimes when the boys were studying he would step out of the open French window for a refreshing glance at his garden, and lose himself for the rest of the morning in pruning his grapevines, smelling his roses, or standing still, lost in his thoughts, far, far away from seven little boys.

He came towards Mamma and Victor across the fallen leaves, taking off his hat, in which he had stuck flowers in the Tyrolean fashion, which he much admired. The seven little boys stopped throwing horse-chestnuts at each other in order to have a good look at the new pupil.

"Here is Victor," said Mamma, looking as if she were going to cry. "He is going to try to be good and study very hard, Mr. Page."

"So you're going to try hard, are you?" asked Mr. Page, looking through him mildly and vaguely.

Victor's hand tightened on Mamma's, and he looked up for directions.

"Yes, Mr. Page," she prompted.

"Yes, Mr. Page."

"Well spoken, Young Meritorious," said Mr. Page, patting his head. "Come and see my tea-roses, ma'am —they've never been more beautiful:

> "'And thou, most lovely Rose,
> Of tint most delicate,
> Fair consort of the morn;
> Delighted to imbibe
> The genial dew of heaven,
> Rich vegetation's vermeil-tinctured gem——'"

And his hand beat time gently on the little boy's silky head.

But if Mr. Page didn't know it was time she went and school began, Mamma did. She turned to say goodbye to Victor.

What had happened to him? What had he done to make himself look so tiny? She felt as if she were looking at him through the wrong end of her opera-glasses. How could she leave him alone, so little and young? She bent to kiss him, and drove away weeping.

The other little boys were scandalized. To be sure, their mothers had brought them to school once, long

ago, but that was when they were young, last year. Behind their geographies they made loud smacking noises and whispered to each other, "Goodbye, Mamma's darling, *sweet* little baby girl!" Victor pretended not to notice them, but the ears that Cousin Lizzie Blow complained of, turned scarlet, and presently one tear trickled down his cheek. But he whisked it off with a finger when no one was looking, and a tortoise-shell butterfly floating in at the window cheered him up a little.

When recess came, he followed the other boys out onto the lawn. He felt too shy to take the pear and the molasses cookies out of his satchel. He didn't quite know what to do. Mamma, or Maggie, or May, or Lily, had always been there to tell him before.

The little boys became terribly busy. They tore out of the open window shouting, "Not it! Not it!" at the top of their lungs. They began a clamorous and confusing game. Victor stood and watched them, his blue eyes wide, his face solemn and excited. Presently he gave a little prancing jump. He was like a lid that lifts on a boiling pot.

"Can you catch?" one boy shouted at him.

"Yes," said Victor, used to Lily's mildly tossed bean-bags.

The boy threw the ball, which bounced off from Victor's middle and rolled into a mint bed.

The little boys laughed and laughed. They went on laughing long after they were comfortably through,

leaning over and letting their arms hang limp, reeling in circles. They shouted to each other, "Can you catch?" and replied, "Oh, yes, perfectly wonderfully grandly!" and flung the ball and did catch it, generally. They didn't throw it again to Victor. He might as well have been a boy made of air, dressed in an air shirt and air pantaloons, for all that they seemed to see him. But they had never shouted so loudly, thrown their ball so nonchalantly, fallen down so often, or panted so hard. They were putting him through childhood's cruel initiation; but also they were showing off to him for all they were worth.

He had never played with children before, except with his worshipping sisters and the colored children he could order about. He felt something heavy swelling in his breast, and his eyes and nose began to prickle.

He thought of home, and the thought was too much for him. He was like the small seaweed-colored fish that will swim back desperately to their seaweed, no matter how often they are taken away from it. There only they are safe. There the seaweed, and the crabs, and the mollusks, and themselves, are all alike, mottled and streaked with the same olives and pale ambers. The clear water is a place of terror, of swooping seagulls and hungry bigger fish—but, oh, the peace, the safety of the seaweed!

The bell rang, and, as the boys crowded back through the window, Victor slipped under the hedge

like a raindrop soaking into the earth, and began to run towards home.

He ran faster than ever before in his life. His heart pounded, his breath came sobbingly, his fair hair stuck on his forehead in dark wet points, and water ran down his face. One stocking kept coming down, and he clutched at it as he ran, and pulled it up. Then in a minute down it would slip, and he would clutch and pull, and down it would slip——

He heard a pounding—thud, thud, thud! He knew it was Mr. Page running after him—Mr. Page grown gigantic, Mr. Page with his black hat as high as a mountain above the floating white clouds of his hair, and the flowers stuck in his hat as tall as mountain pine trees——

But, when at last he couldn't run another step, there was no one there. The road was empty; the fields of grass and wildflowers were still except for the song of the grasshoppers; the river flowed blue and peaceful in the sunshine.

He didn't dare stop very long. He began to run again, clutching at his stocking, kicking up the dust with his nice new shoes.

Martha was churning in the kitchen shed. Slap, slap! The butter was coming beautifully, in little yellow lumps. Albert came in to get a pail of water at the pump and said something polite to which she

responded with a yell of light-hearted laughter. Then she gave another yell, a different one.

Victor panted up the steps, still clutching at his stocking. His breath came in loud, hiccuping sobs; his face was streaked and furrowed with dust and sweat.

"Wh-where's M a m m a, M-martha? Where's Mamma?"

"Mah *goo*ness, honey! Pump him a drink, yo' Albert—let Martha wipe off yo' face, po' lamb—an' den run find his Mamma and tell huh he's done come home."

Mamma was in the grape-house with Caesar. The leaves and the heavy bunches of grapes made a broad cool pattern against the sky's blue dazzle, and there were shadow leaves on her wide straw hat and on her arms, creamy and smooth between her flowing sleeves and her loose gardening gloves.

The air was moist and warm and fragrant. Caesar stood on the old broken chair and cut a heavy bunch of grapes, Mamma lifted up the leaf-lined basket and he laid the bunch in, so gently, as if he were laying a sleeping baby in its cradle. But she let the basket drop and came running, when Albert told her Victor had come home by himself.

He sat on Mamma's lap, her tender arms around him. He looked at them all with round eyes over the top of the tumbler, silver with coolness. He drank and drank and drank. And they were all there,

around him, Mamma and the girls, old Chloe in the doorway still holding the bowl she had been mixing corn bread in, Martha, and Albert, and Caesar with his scissors, and Trusty thumping his tail on the floor. Home drew around him, welcoming him. The little fish was safe in his seaweed again.

Chapter Eight

EACH year the pencil marks to show how much the children had grown crept up and up by the side door, like a rising tide. And then Maggie's stopped rising, and she was a grown-up young lady; though you wouldn't have known it from seeing her in the morning, in her shabby old dress, up in the cherry tree helping Albert pick cherries, or galloping around the meadow bare-back on Stella, or, in the woods, pulling off her stockings and dew-soaked shoes to wade knee-deep with Victor in the foam-flecked brown brook.

But, when they drove to evening parties, or rolled up their own parlor carpet and sprinkled candle-shavings over the floor, she blossomed out with bustle and chignon, high heels and long ear-rings; and every bit of her was young lady then, except the little boy feelings inside of her.

The world was flowing in on them—here a little trickle, there a rush. So many more people than there used to be, and so much to do! Dancing and picnics and tableaux—oh, life was such fun!

May tried to pull Mamma's gown together at the waist while Mamma looked Maggie and Lily over.

She knew May would be all right, but the other two were so careless.

Maggie's straight brown hair was parted in the middle, and brushed, sleek as satin, over a huge bun of chignon. Her cream and brown striped silk dress cocked up like a wren's tail behind in a big bustle, and then cascaded off into a little train, and Mamma had lent her a lace frill for her open collar.

Lily was in blue, to match her eyes, and her fair flowing hair, crimped except just at the ends from its tight braiding, was pushed back of ears from which dangled balls of silver filigree as big as cherries. Both the girls looked very neat—but, oh dear, what big waists, thought Mamma with a sigh. May was the only one who managed to have a wasp waist. She didn't mind how hard they pulled her corset strings. Holding on to the bed post, drawing in her breath, she would get Lily to pull on them with all her strength. She didn't care how much too small her high-heeled slippers were, either, just so she could squeeze her feet into them. Feeling like the princess in the fairy tale who walked barefoot over fire and swords, she would dance all evening, laughing and talking, though when she got home she would burst into tears from pain and exhaustion.

"Don't slouch, Lily. Will you *ever* learn to stand properly?" sighed Mamma.

"Well, but Mamma dear! I *do* get so tired doing that old Grecian bend!"

"Well, remember to when you're in company, or I shall die of mortification. Back up to me, Maggie, your pannier's crooked. Now *don't* fidget——"

"Pull in, Mamma!" said May, tugging at Mamma's grey satin. "*There!* Oh, I *wish* you'd let me have a low body like yours—I hate these old high necks!"

Mamma took a placid look in the mirror at her bosom and shoulders bulging out of her black lace and grey ruching—bulging, but with such delicious creaminess. She tried to keep her mouth from quirking up at the corners as she remembered that Mr. Alfred Lacey had told his gentlemanly sister Mrs. Thornton, who good-naturedly told Mamma, that he had never seen finer shoulders. She wondered if he would be there tonight—perhaps she'd better wear her garnet necklace. The dark red made her bosom look even whiter.

"Anyway, you *might* let me have some evening hair," May complained, pouting, her mouth a bunched red bud. She was the beauty of the family, with her long lashes and deep warm coloring, her tiny waist and round little bosom; but her hair wouldn't grow long. It just foamed in short curls all over her head, looking so silly and babyish. If *only* Mamma would let her have some coronet braids or a rippling switch to flow over her shoulder! But Mamma would only laugh and pinch her cheek gently and say fifteen was too young for evening hair.

Young and warm together under the buffalo robes, while the sleigh-bells rang—merry—mournful—they drove from all over the country for miles around, over the snow to the party.

Lily liked best to play the piano while the others danced. She felt shy and awkward, sitting waiting to be asked, not knowing whether she was more afraid that some one would ask her, or that no one would. She could play "Water Lily Waltz" and "Over the Waves" pretty well, and parts of lots of others; but she was a conscientious performer, and when she played parts wrong she would stop and say, "Oh dear! Wait a minute!" and play them over again. It was a relief to the dancers when some good-natured mother would shoo her off the piano-stool.

"Now then, Lily Campion! Run and have a good time with the young people!"

"Oh, I don't mind playing, Mrs. Austen, really I don't."

But she would go docilely, and waltz with kind fathers and little brothers. And often Mamma's new friend Mr. Lacey would give her a turn, bounding as lightly as a balloon on his neat little feet.

Or they all went skating together. Oh, how beautifully the young gentlemen skimmed over the ice, cutting grape-vines and figure eights, leaning far over with one leg stuck out behind, showing off to the girls, who glided demurely about with their little hats with pheasant feathers and cascading veils pitched over

their noses, and their tiny muffs held tight to their waists beneath their rounded busts.

Maggie skated beautifully—too well to charm the gentlemen. Victor and his young friends darted about like water-bugs, using the others for bases and bumpers. Lily was fat and her ankles were weak, so she stood on the side of her feet and watched the others, most of the time. As for May, the part she liked best was having her skates put on.

"What tiny feet!"

"Oh, now you're making fun of me, and I think it's downright mean in you!"

"No, I'm not, on my honor, I never saw such little feet."

"Goodness, I don't see why you think my feet are little! I think they're *huge!* Yes, I do! *Truly!*"

Between winter and spring came Lent. They all went to church for the Litany every Wednesday evening; and the Campion girls gave up candy. Lily gave up desserts, too, because she loved them so. She would stand looking at a charlotte russe or a Bavarian cream on the sideboard until she couldn't bear it another minute and had to rush away, out of temptation. Once, halfway through Lent, she fell. Putting what was left of the Bavarian cream into the slide on Martha's evening out, she seized a tablespoonful and crammed it into her mouth. But between her haste and the size of the mouthful and her shame at breaking her promise to Lord Jesus, she nearly choked to death.

Then out from the long dark tunnel of Lent into the brightness of Easter. The parlor fragrant with Mamma's fat sausage-shaped hyacinths of creamy pink and silvery blue—fat ladies with beautiful souls—the eggs that had been boiled tied up in bits of colored calico that dyed them in such charming splotches and blots of color. Victor and Lily ate four apiece for breakfast on Easter morning, and Maggie ate two, but Mamma and May were delicate, and only had one each. And then they drove to church, to sing, happy and self-conscious in their new straw hats:

> " 'The strife is o'er, the battle done;
> The victory of life is won;
> The song of triumph has begun.
> Alleluia!' "

Mr. Lacey sang away in his pew, too, so tidy, so shining, with his pink face, his kind round blue eyes and silky nut-brown whiskers, his neat gloves and beautifully laundered linen, that he looked as if he must be kept under a glass bell from Sunday to Sunday. And as soon as church was over he came hurrying out to help Mamma into the carriage.

When summer came, they all went sailing, and had picnic suppers on the Jersey shore. The girls in their blue flannel boating costumes unpacked the baskets, and made coffee over the driftwood fires the young men built, and pretended they were very busy and mustn't be bothered. "Ah-h-h" sighed the little

waves, coming in over the sand, drawing back. "Ah-h-h—" The breeze brought them the river smell —the cool wet smell of mud and reeds and soaking rotten wood; and over the Delaware hills the sunset deepened, violet, orange and rose. One white star trembled. Victor raced along the shore. Other little boys might be left at home, but not he. He found a dead crab, and chased the girls with it—*ugh!* the smelly thing!

And everyone was so funny.

"Does your mother know you're out?" they called to each other; and oh, the laughter when some young lady would cry, "We've forgotten the spoons!" The very word spoon, the sight of a spoon, was enough to send the young men off into fits of laughter, while the girls tried to look innocent and demure.

Sailing home through the moonlight the laughter would grow gentle, would die.

"'My Bonny lies over the ocean,
My Bonny lies over the sea,
My Bonny lies over the ocean;
Oh, bring back my Bonny to me!'"

Swish, swish! The liquid moon-silver flowed gently, strongly back from the bow of the boat, and young hands groped for young hands, and found them.

"'Bring back, bring back,
Oh, bring back my Bonny to me——to me!
Bring back, bring back,
Oh, bring back my Bonny to me!

"'Last night, as I lay on my pillow,
Last night, as I lay on my bed,
Last night, as I lay on my pillow,
I dreamt that my Bonny was dead!'"

And it would have been too sweet, too sad to bear if some one had not sung, mock-tragically:

"Oh, bring back my Bonny, and don't be so funny——!"

Chapter Nine

THEY went to the woods for Christmas greens, jolting along in the farm cart. The pine trees were all plumy and feathery with the snow that came sifting down from a lead-colored sky. The brook was frozen over, but if you listened hard you could hear it faintly chuckling, gurgling, flowing along under the ice. Victor, with his cheeks as red as his mittens, jumped up and down, shouted, fell flat in the snow and pretended to swim, because he was so happy. Just the snow was enough, just driving to the woods and bringing back that feathery, swishing green load was enough—and beside these, Christmas was coming!

They all went up to the Sunday school room in the evening, to make the Christmas decorations for the church by the light of the dim oil lamps in their brackets. Lily and Victor made little bunches of cedar and laurel—two sprays of laurel and one of cedar, and then two sprays of cedar and one of laurel —and handed them up to the others, who bound them with string on long ropes. Lily had tried to make the ropes, but her sprays always came tumbling out, just as poor Aunt Priscilla's did. How fragrant the evergreens were, and how black they made everyone's

hands! Even Mr. Lacey's hands were black. He was bunching for Mamma, making her laugh with the ridiculous things he kept saying, and laughing himself, rich peals of tenor laughter. She could always understand his jokes—so many good puns! Since he and she had become such friends, she had begun to make little jokes herself, and grow girlish and arch and saucy. The girls never laughed when she mispronounced humorously, or when she talked funny French and said "Silver plate" and "Fox pass," but Mr. Lacey did, and it made her feel so young again.

When the decorations were finished, the ropes and the wreaths and the big star of box and holly to hang over the chancel, and when Mr. Almond's knife was found, the scraps of pine and cedar were burnt in the stove, roaring up sudden and white, and then popping like little pistol shots. How fragrant! They all gathered around the stove to warm themselves before going out into the winter night, while Uncle Willie stood on a chair and blew out the lamps.

"Goodnight! Goodnight!" The light from the bobbing lanterns falls in circles on the snow, climbs up the tree-trunks and over the dark hedges. The stars are shining, the sleigh-bells are chiming. Wait! This is the perfect moment! Stay with us for a little while! But the moment is over. The bells are no longer loud and merry—they are sad and faint—they have passed—they are still.

That moment before the parlor door was opened, Victor felt as if he would burst. And when he saw the Christmas tree he was struck dumb for a moment. Then he began to jump up and down, screaming with joy.

The tree was too tall even for the high parlor ceiling. Its head was bent over, and it looked as if it were bowing to them, holding out its dark green silver woven skirts, and bending its head, crowned with a silver star.

There were glass baskets and bells, and wax birds in their gilt wire cages. There were nets cut out of colored paper, holding candy, and more candy in small lace bags. There were gold and silver stars, and gilded walnuts, and strings of cranberries and popcorn. The stout shrimp-pink wax angel was there, swimming away, with a green twig under her for a life preserver. She was always there, every Christmas, and so was the cardboard folding church, with windows made of paper like colored glass, and sparkles all over the snow on the roof. By the church door stood a cardboard Santa Claus in a white fur coat, giving a basket of toys and pink and yellow apples to a little cardboard boy and girl. In front of the church on the snowy ground was printed a poem in German, and the Campion children felt as if it held such a secret, such an answer, if they could only read it! But none of them could, and Mamma couldn't either.

On the end of a branch hung a little silver glass bell, and when Victor set it ringing gently with the tip of his finger it seemed to set another little bell ringing in his own heart.

They had their presents; they went to church, each wearing a sprig of holly, like so many plum puddings, and screamed:

"'*Shout* the glad tidings, *ex*ultingly si-hi-hi-hi-hing!'"

They came home and had an enormous dinner; and now they were in the parlor, stuffed and sleepy. Mamma, in one of the fashionable new low chairs in which people lay stretched out with their chins propped on their chests, was half asleep in front of the fire, with "Poppies in the Corn" fallen to the floor beside her, only rousing now and then to ask one of the girls to stamp out sparks on the carpet that always proved to be bits of tinsel from the tree. May had fallen asleep on the sofa, and Lily was comfortably weeping over her new book and automatically eating the raisins she had found in her stocking that morning, while Maggie, in spite of her years, lay full length on the floor with Victor, languidly setting up and knocking over his Christmas tin soldiers.

And then there was a pealing of sleigh-bells at the door, and Martha scuffling through the hall, grumbling and tying on her apron as she went, to let in a whirl of snowy air and bells and laughing Mr. Lacey, but-

toned warmly down to his ankles in a tight fawn-colored coat with a little fur collar, and wearing a low crowned brown derby hat like a mould of chocolate blanc-mange in a curly rimmed saucer.

"Oh, my gracious me!" cried Mamma, scrambling up in a panic, and settling her braids in what she could see of the overmantel mirror that gleamed in little chinks through Japanese fans as a pond gleams through an overgrowth of spatterdock pads. Mr. Lacey came bounding in, all chill and pink and fresh. He had brought Mamma a Christmas present—a pug dog! *Café au lait* color, with a tight screw of tail and a squashed-up funny little black face, and with a big scarlet bow on its collar.

"Oh! *Oh!* For *me?*" cried Mamma. "Oh, you sweet pet!"

"Thank you, thank you!" caroled Mr. Lacey roguishly, trilling his laughter.

"Oh, Mr. Lacey! Fie! How can you? I mean this sweet little pet—yes, it *was* a pet, so it was. Let me see, what shall I call it? What shall I call it, children?"

"Call it Trixie."

"Call it Brownie."

"What shall Mamma call the doggie, Victor, precious?"

"I don't know, Mamma."

"I didn't like to think of you without any dog at all," Mr. Lacey explained. For silky, black Trusty

was dead. He was buried in the garden, and already a little peach tree was growing up out of his grave, from the stone of a peach that the weeping Lily had absentmindedly eaten at his burial.

"Call it Lassie, Mamma," May suggested.

"That's a good idea, honey. Lassie! That's very pretty! Here, Lassie, Lassie, Lassie. Here, little Lassie!"

Mr. Lacey was in a quandary. How to tell her delicately that Lassie was a Laddie? Perhaps he had better get his sister to tell her—but no. Em had a way of putting things so strongly. So presently—not too soon to be embarrassing—he called to the pug:

"Here, Lad! Here, sir!"

But Mamma couldn't bring herself to say "Laddie"—it would have made such a point of it! So, delicate as Mr. Lacey, she announced after a while that she had changed her mind, and was going to call her pug Brownie, after all.

Mr. Lacey liked everybody so much, he couldn't believe that anyone didn't like him. But Victor didn't like him in spite of pennies, in spite of tricks with his fresh finely embroidered pocket handkerchiefs. He hated to be laughed at, and he knew that sooner or later Mr. Lacey would begin laughing.

"Well, sir!" cried Mr. Lacey, flinging a kind arm about the little boy's stiff and unresponsive body. "You're just the young gentleman I've been wanting

to see. I have a question I want to ask you—let's see if you can answer me this. When—do—young ladies—eat a musical instrument."

"I don't know."

"I don't know, Mr. ——," Mamma prompted.

"I don't know, Mr. Lacey."

"You mean to say you don't know when Miss Maggie, and Miss May, and Miss Lily, eat a musical instrument? A bright young gentleman like you? Oh, come! I don't believe that, you know!"

"A flute?" ventured Victor uncertainly, and turned scarlet at Mr. Lacey's peals of laughter.

"A flute! That's good, upon my word! I must remember that one! No, my lad, I see I'll have to tell you. When they have a pianoforte—a piano—for—tea!" And his laughter pealed again, while Victor's serious face remained unchanged.

"Well, never say die! Maybe you can tell me this one, young Sir Sobersides! What is the difference between a postage stamp and a bad boy?"

But Victor couldn't tell him that, either.

Mr. Lacey wasn't just a joker. No, indeed! He could talk about all sorts of deep subjects. He had read Mr. Darwin's "Origin of Species" and his new book, "The Descent of Man"—well, at least, not exactly read them, but he had glanced through them, and knew what they were all about. Mamma, of course, was horrified at the very idea (her idea) of

Darwinism. She *wasn't* descended from monkeys! And what about the Bible? But Mr. Lacey, leaning back with his finger-tips pressed together and a neat boot wagging, said there might be something in it—he didn't say there *was*, mind you, but there *might* be. Mamma was almost in tears before she could persuade him to say that he himself didn't believe a word of it.

The snowy twilight deepened, and the room was dark except for the firelight. The bunches of holly over the oil paintings of "The First Babe," and "The Rendezvous," of the cats and kittens with pink satin bows, and of the Italian peasants who seemed to spend all their time at fountains, melted into the gloomy background of the parlor paper, dark grey-green with shadowy vegetation and tendrils and swirls of gold. It was the time that they always lit the wax candles on the Christmas tree, and yet here was Mamma lying back in her chair with Brownie in her lap, just as if it were any ordinary day and she had nothing in the world to do but listen to Mr. Lacey complain because ladies were getting so mannish.

"Neckties, wristbands, shirt-collars and shirt-fronts —upon my word, my sister Em had on a waistcoat this morning I thought was my own, except that it was satin. You may call me old-fashioned——"

"Oh, no, *indeed*, Mr. Lacey!"

"But I must say I like Lovely Woman to be womanly! All this agitation for Women's Rights——"

"Dreadful!" breathed Mamma.

"To my way of thinking," said Mr. Lacey, gazing earnestly and admiringly at Mamma, "Woman's Right is the right to reign supreme in the heart and home of mere man——"

Oh, why didn't he go home, so that they could light the candles? Victor could hardly stand it. He tried to comfort himself by ringing the little silver bell, but he couldn't hear it through Mr. Lacey's voice.

Chapter Ten

IT was so hot that to breathe was like putting your head under a towel and over the tea-kettle. The air quivered, the hens lay in the shade, now and then uttering a languid "kraw-aw-k," or following with sleepy eyes the flight of a butterfly it was too much trouble to make a try for. Mamma went upstairs after lunch, and got out of her corsets and into a muslin dressing-sacque, but then instead of lying down she took up Mr. Lacey's note and re-read it, pleased, confused, embarrassed, pushed it out of sight behind the box that held her evening hair, and then bent to read a sentence just *once* again, with reluctant pleasure.

He was coming to tea this evening. He had come to tea ever so many evenings, but this evening would be different, for his heart, the note said, would no longer allow him to keep silence.

And what did her heart tell her to say to him? She ought to pray about it, but other things got mixed up with her prayers and confused her. But certainly she should have Divine guidance. She reached over for the Bible by her bed, shut her eyes, opened at random and brought down a finger:

"And Gilead, and the border of the Geshurites and Maachathites, and all mount Hermon, and all Beshan unto Salcah."

God moves in a mysterious way. Perhaps this meant that she should take the best bit of advice out of three tries. She shut her eyes again, her finger fell:

"The salutation of *me* Paul with mine own hand."

But what had Paul to do with Alfred?

"It's the third time that counts," said Mamma to herself, but her lifted finger paused. Suppose God should take it seriously this time, and advise against her union with Mr. Lacey? Better not run the risk. She put down the Bible.

Mr. Lacey! Mr. Lacey!

It was so thrilling! She was all soft pleasurable tremors. She smiled at herself in the mirror, her face like a full-blown pink rose. But the mirror was old and put a wash of faint green over the rose, that was not becoming. Oh, dear, she did wish she had the kind of toilet-table she had read about in novels, with a maid to change the lace and bows and flowers for each toilet.

"*What does Madame wish to wear to the Duchess's dinner this evening?*"

"*My violet satin, Marie, and my pearls.*"

And when she came up to dress the toilet-table

would look as if a flock of pale purple butterflies had floated in at the open window and lighted among the foamy laces, and the candle-light would fall on Parma violets——

Not much like this clumsy, dark old thing, with the wad of paper tucked in at the side to keep the mirror tilted at the proper angle. Perhaps—if—Mr. Lacey said his happiness would be to make her happy. And beauty made her so happy!

And what should she wear tonight? She really hadn't anything fit to be seen. She opened her closet door and looked discontentedly at bustled dresses, dark sacques, a row of hats that looked like a poulterer's window, and green and tobacco-brown parasols with rings in their noses, for carrying upside down. One dress of golden brown velvet and grey satin, with black lace and ruches and passementerie, she could never look at without a surge of self pity. It had been expensive—sombre browns and greys, colors resembling faded flowers and withered leaves, were the extreme of fashion and dear accordingly, and, of course, it was the truest economy to buy really handsome materials. Even though she had made it herself on the wonder of the neighborhood, her new Grover and Baker sewing machine, the cost of the velvet and satin and lace had given her a dizzy moment when she succeeded in adding up the sum to something approaching the right amount. But things were so high

now, and it was so becoming, and anyway, she really and truly had needed it, for she had made her old dresses over and tried to freshen them with frills and bows until she was ashamed to be seen in them. And then Maggie had spoiled all her pleasure in it by saying she thought it was awful to spend so much on a dress while there were poor people who hadn't enough to eat. Mamma had cried dreadfully, for nobody hated more than she to think that there was anyone in the world hungry or unhappy or poor—it made her feel perfectly wretched when she let herself remember it. And she always tried to be kind to the poor, and drove around at Christmas with baskets, and took nice flannel to all the new black babies, no matter how faint the stuffy, smelly cabins made her feel. Mr. Lacey called her an "angel of mercy." Besides, Maggie didn't understand at all; she never wanted anything but hideous sensible short dresses and mudproof galoshes of India rubber.

Mr. Lacey thought ladies were made for adorning—it would be so sweet to have sympathy!

Sympathy, servants, admiration, gowns—and he would do so much for Victor and the girls. Her thoughts drifted here and there like butterflies, floating with the sure instinct of those practical insects to sweetness after sweetness.

He would do so much for Victor—that mattered

more than anything. Her eyes grew moist with the tears of tenderness that came so easily. Darling, darling little boy! But he did need a father's guidance, a man's strong hand. He had been hard to manage lately, making such a fuss over taking his boiled onions and molasses when he had a sore throat, stealing the strawberries he had been told not to touch, and amusing himself by drawing secular subjects on Sunday. Only this morning he had run away, gone fishing with Jake, old Chloe's great-grandson, when he knew he wasn't allowed to go on the river without a grown-up. Mamma saw them toiling up the lane from the river, so small, so hot, and hardened her heart to scold him. But when he burst on her, wet, scarlet, dirty, with his face radiant with love, crying, "Mamma! Mamma! I caught a fish for your lunch!" what could she do but kiss him, and later eat the horrid thing—it was a catfish, and nothing but love would have made her touch it—with tiny bites cloaked with loud cries of rapture.

The memory of her lunch made her feel quite hungry, and she thought with pleasure of the creamed sweetbreads they were going to have for tea—had she given Martha the sherry for them? Potato salad, cubes of ivory, crisp little white leaves from the heart of the lettuce, and the mayonnaise she made herself so patiently, so beautifully. "It takes a lady to

make mayonnaise"—that was one of her maxims. She loved to make it, hypnotized by the drop, drop of the oil, the steady beating of the fork, the smooth rich thickening. Then beaten biscuit—the house had echoed to the thud of their making yesterday. Big red velvet raspberries and dark moist chunks of fruit-cake, and coffee with Buttercup's cream that rolled from the cream-pitcher in a slow, thick, yellow fold. The thought of the good things they were going to have made water come into her mouth; then she remembered who was coming to tea, and why, and decided she wouldn't be able to eat a mouthful.

It would be a pleasure to plan delicious meals, with Mr. Lacey to appreciate them. A gentleman made all the difference. And, of course, she always asked God, the Night-Watchman, to keep them all safe until morning, but He had so many households to guard, and, when she thought she heard a burglar, it would be reassuring to have a husband. "There's nothing like a gentleman in the house to keep one from moping," thought Mamma.

A series of little pictures of Mr. Lacey floated before her. Mr. Lacey about to sing, pulling himself up like a rooster about to crow (though that was not the way she thought of it).

> "'Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
> On yonder lea, on yonder lea——'"

(But you couldn't imagine Mr. Lacey in a cold blast. You couldn't imagine those silky whiskers rumpled, those decorous coat-tails blown out.)

Mr. Lacey bringing her gloxinias for the conservatory, large bells of white and violet-blue.

Mr. Lacey in his tam-o'-shanter on a botanizing stroll, telling them all the wildflower names.

Mr. Lacey reading Tennyson and Longfellow aloud to her—so much prettier than that Keats that Papa had been so fond of, and you never felt nervous about what might be coming next.

Mr. Lacey in his blue flannels and his straw sailor hat with a blue ribbon taking them on the river in his sailboat so prettily named "Swallow."

Mr. Lacey—no, the pictures grew too intimate. Mamma, diffused with a warmth not of the day, put her hands over her eyes. Soft waves surged over her body, and the heart in her breast swelled until it held the earth, the sky, the sun and moon and stars. She forgot toilet-tables and how much a man might help a little boy; she forgot cooking sherry and the proprieties. She was no longer thirty-nine, fat, the mother of four children, nor was Mr. Lacey a dapper little gentleman with a sunny temper and an assured income. They were the hidden heart of the world, the pulse of life, the creators, through which life flows in its endless circle.

Bowls of roses on little tables of papier maché inlaid with mother of pearl, perfumed the darkened parlor in honor of Mr. Lacey. Other roses, artificial, adorned the ornament like the skirt of a lady's ballgown that filled the empty fireplace, looking as if the lady's head were stuck up the chimney, looking for swallows, perhaps, or stars. Under the bronze Arabs and camels standing beneath palm trees from which wax candles rose, the chilly marble mantelpiece had been put into a red flannel petticoat embroidered in yellow chain-stitch; and the chairs were dressed decently in tatted tidies. Everything in the room was well covered except the Venus de Milo in the darkest corner, that had been a Christmas present from the Blows. Was the statue *quite* nice, Mamma wondered? But it would have been so embarrassing explaining to Sam and Lizzie, if she had hidden it, and she remembered that Papa had said there were ever so much worse ones abroad.

The parlor windows had new terra-cotta curtains, and lace ones as well. The old crimson curtains had been hung upstairs in the school-room. Their folds concealed Victor curled up in a corner of the window seat, sleepy from his morning of fishing on the glaring river. Neither May or Lily knew he was there.

Lily ought to have been practicing "Convent Bells at Twilight" on the piano with its fan of puckered green silk in the front, and the swinging candle-hold-

ers. But it was so hot, and four flats were so hard. Besides, she wanted to talk to May, who was cutting out a picture of a statue of Psyche to paste on green "velvet" cardboard. Lily watched the quick flashing of the sharp scissors. If she had been doing it she would have torn the delicate winged figure, or pasted it on crooked, or messed the glue. She did things clumsily, as if her finger-tips were numb, not like May's that seemed as sensitive as the finger-tips of a blind person.

"May!"

"Mm," said May, abstracted.

"May, do you think Mamma is going to—that Mamma and Mr. Lacey are going to—you know!"

"Oh, Lily! Don't!" May blushed brightly, delicately, and began to laugh; and Lily, blushing and laughing too, swung this way, that way on the fringed plush mushroom of the piano stool.

"Wouldn't it seem—I don't know—*funny*, if they got married? I sort of think maybe they will, though, don't you?"

The sisters looked at each other, shaking with nervous laughter. They were curious, uneasy, and mildly unhappy. But Lily would have quite loved kind Mr. Lacey, if only the others had, and May had a sudden flashing vision of gloves from Paris, a trip to Italy.

"*Who is that beautiful girl with the wistful eyes, looking out to sea?*"

"That is May Campion, the step-daughter of the rich Mr. Lacey. He showers every luxury upon her, they say."

"And yet that lovely face is the saddest I ever saw in my life."

"May—do you think Mr. Lacey ever—ever kisses Mamma?"

"Lily, how can you? You're perfectly awful! Stop, for mercy's sake!"

But they couldn't stop laughing. Lily's head went down with a clash on the piano keys, and her hair curtained her burning cheeks, while May's hands shook so she had to put down the little picture—Psyche, the butterfly-winged, Psyche, the soul. But it was not only laughter that made her hands shake. Thinking about kissing did, too. She thought so much about being kissed. She longed passionately to be kissed, and would have died rather than admit it, for Mamma had brought her daughters up with great propriety. The prince of her secret dreams, in pink tights with a white ostrich tip in his toque, had long since given way to a dark handsome cruel Roman emperor, in snowy toga and imperial purple mantle, with his brows drawn together over his dark eyes. And she was a Christian virgin, exquisite, slender, white as a stalk of fire-white lilies. He tortured her and she adored him, he pressed his beautiful scornful mouth to hers, and she melted away with delight. At night she would

lie thrilling, trembling, burying her face in the pillow so that the little moans of ecstasy she could not keep back, should not waken Lily, sleeping so quietly beside her.

Now that she was growing up she sometimes "tried on" different young men in her imagination, in the place of her emperor. And although she looked on her love life as the reality, Mamma's as the dream, she tried to imagine Mr. Lacey kissing Mamma—oh—*horrid!* So prim and pecky! Or else soft and playful, which would be worse. A kiss wouldn't be a kiss unless it hurt you, made you want to swoon, to die! But Mr. Lacey kissing Mamma would be as passionate as Mamma's canary pecking at a cherry hung between the bars of his cage. The idea was so silly—so—oh! It made her feel hysterical. She said, to stop her thoughts:

"Lily! Be an angel and make some lemonade. I'm dead with this heat."

Lily pretended for a moment that she couldn't stop laughing; but seeing that May was all through, she answered amiably:

"I will if you'll come with me and ask Martha for the lemons. She's cross as two sticks having company to tea on such a hot day."

They went off together, just in time, for Victor could no longer hold in his sobs, and they burst loudly on the empty school-room. Mamma was going to

marry Mr. Lacey! The idea had never entered his head, and the shock was terrific. Between the forces of life that like a wave lifted Mamma and Mr. Lacey before toppling over and submerging such little in-the-way creatures as himself, and the power of the mid-summer sun, that had poured itself all morning on his bare head, he was unbearably shaken. Sobbing, he leaned from the window and was sick into the fern-bed far below.

Out in the steaming heat of the "truck patch" Maggie was picking raspberries. It was so hot. The grape leaves, green on one side, pale grey suéde on the other, that she had just picked to line the raspberry baskets, were already limp. There was a singing sound in her ears, and now and then blackness and a bursting of blood-red stars floated before her eyes.

She knew from the way Mamma was acting that she was going to marry Mr. Lacey. She had been so shy and smiling, looking like a happy little girl. She had even tried to tell Maggie something, after Mr. Lacey's coachman brought over a note this morning, but Maggie, fiercely loyal to Papa, had been forbiddingly silent and sullen.

"That little lady-killer to take Papa's place!" she thought bitterly, desperately. And, yet even to her who loved him so, Papa had grown far away and dim

—a dear dream that faded even as she tried to remember.

The moist heat rolled over her like waves. Two cabbage butterflies, one pure white, one faintly veined with green, a Mr. Lacey and a Mrs. Campion of the insect world, quivered over the raspberry bushes, and a dust-colored toad gave a languid hop as she nearly stepped on him, but no other creatures were in sight anywhere; humans were in their darkened houses, birds in their shadowy green ones. Pushing the hair up from her wet forehead with the back of her wrist, Maggie went on picking raspberries for Mr. Lacey's tea.

Chapter Eleven

MAMMA planned to be surprised in the garden; but as the time for Mr. Lacey's arrival drew near, she grew shy and stayed with the girls on the porch. She wouldn't let them out of her sight. She felt dreadfully nervous.

She was wearing her white flounced, bustled dress with the little black bows all over it, and her black fringed sash. Black ribbons were tied around her wrists, and an onyx cross on a black velvet ribbon tobogganed on her bosom. She had tucked a crimson rose in her great bird's nest of braids—would *he* think that was flighty? But just as she began to take it out, his carriage wheels were heard on the drive, and she had only time to fling one arm about Victor, one about Lily, who were showing signs of running away, before Martha brought him out on the porch.

A new Mr. Lacey, surely! This Mr. Lacey is too spotless, too creaseless, too twinklingly tidy, ever to have been used before. He has never run, ridden on smoky trains, gone to bed, burnt his mouth, fallen down, or shed tears. He has just been created, he and his silver-grey suit, his shoes as polished as black glass, his linen so white that it makes you blink, the cluster of

dark geranium in his buttonhole. Or else he has just been done over from tip to toe, with a new wig and whiskers of glossy nut-brown silk, and a fresh coat of pink paint for his face, and of sky-blue paint for his eyes.

No, his eyes are not sky-blue paint, but the real sky itself, and those are real stars shining in them.

"My prediction is that in a hundred years we will all be going about in balloons," said Mr. Lacey.

"Oh, dear!" said Mamma. "Nothing would in*duce* me!"

That was the end of that. What could they talk about now?

Literature! That was always a nice topic. But one had to be careful with young ladies present. Hawthorne was all right if one stuck to "The Marble Faun," but there was always "The Scarlet Letter" lurking in the background. He tried George Eliot, who had just written a novel called "Middlemarch."

"We've read 'Mill on the Floss,'" said May. Mamma didn't know about Mr. Lewes, but the girls did, and that got them through the dull parts.

"Quite an authoress, quite an authoress!" Mr. Lacey decided kindly.

"I hardly like to let the girls read her," said Mamma. "It sounds so *fast*—a lady calling herself George! Pass the biscuits, please, Martha."

The conversation fainted again, and again Mr. Lacey leapt forward with restoratives. President Grant and Mr. Home, the Spiritualist, helped him out; and, at the mention of Dr. Livingstone and Mr. Stanley, the Congo rolled through their minds, with variations, for none of them had very clear ideas about it. But Mr. Lacey had to do the work, for Mamma was nervous and the children silent.

He tried lighter topics, and described the ladies of fashion he had seen at Saratoga last month, with hair dressed so high, with the bonnets perched on top such explosions of feathers and flowers, that it seemed as if the gentlemen escorting them should have walked on stilts. "The *height* of fashion!" cried Mr. Lacey, expecting laughter. For once his lady failed him, murmuring, "*Do* have some more salad," but he didn't mind. Above all things he admired sensibility in Lovely Woman.

"Eat your nice sweetbread, darling," Mamma urged Victor tenderly, smiling at him. She wanted, oh, she wanted to show them all how much she loved them. The warmth and fragrance of her love poured out over her little boy.

"Victor caught a big fish this morning, for our lunch."

"Caught a big fish, did he? *This* big, eh?" Mr. Lacey measured off improbable lengths of air. "What, not that big, young Sir Piscator? Well, I suppose the bigger fish got away—I thought so, I thought so!

You're a true fisherman!" He slapped his napkined knee, and his laughter pealed out. Even Mamma had to laugh a little in spite of Victor's gloomy face. Mr. Lacey was so droll.

Panic-stricken, she would have stayed with the children all evening. But Mr. Lacey was firm. He wanted to be shown the roses. With Brownie at their heels, they strolled across the grass, and the hemlock hedge that separated the lawn from the garden hid them.

The girls didn't want to be waiting there on the river porch when Mamma and Mr. Lacey came up from the garden. They took their round straw mats and sat on the grass under the trees in front of the house. The western sky was a sheet of pure gold, and against it the weeping willow by the servants' cabins across the road was a dark fountain—a fountain springing and falling, springing and falling forever. Somebody from one of the cabins began to play the banjo, languidly, for it was still so hot. The notes spattered out, seemed drops from that fountain pouring up against the golden sky that faded as they watched it, and then grew dark. The music stopped, everything was quiet but the insects that sounded as if they were mechanical insects being wound up for tomorrow.

There was a crunch of steps on the drive—of course, Mamma and Mr. Lacey thought the girls would be on

the porch, they were all hiding from each other—and the gentleman's voice said cheerfully:

"I wonder how it will feel to be Paterfamilias to three lively young ladies and a young hopeful!"

Lily's nervous giggle escaped before she could cram her hands against her mouth, and the voice sank to a murmur, the steps withdrew. Presently they heard his carriage roll away; and Mamma was standing in the lighted doorway calling: "Children! I want you!"

No need to tell them what had happened, her face was so beautiful and radiant. She was like a great white water-lily that opens softly to show a golden heart, a great white cloud, gold in the sun. Floating, floating, far away from earth. Even the hard knot of pain in Maggie's breast melted as she hugged Mamma.

"Where's my Victor?"

"I put him to bed, Mamma. He wasn't feeling very well."

"Poor little man! I'll see if he's asleep. Girls——"

"Yes, Mamma."

"Darlings, I *do* love you so much!"

Victor was awake, a huddle of misery. His head was wet, he was sure he was going to be sick again. Half waking, half sleeping dreams filled the room. Mr. Lacey's body in its silver-grey suit—but the head was the head of the catfish he caught for Mamma—the dark grey of wet slate, with long fleshy feelers

like drooping mustaches—a face as terrifying, as evil, as the Chinese devils in the Foreign Mission book at Mr. Page's. And from the face came the purring sound that had come from the catfish lying in the bottom of the boat—the frightening purring that had gone on until Jake hit it over the head.

Now the catfish face was laughing at him, the silver-grey sides of Mr. Lacey's suit were shaking. And over the bed, past the windows, head-down from the ceiling, floated Mamma and the girls, laughing at him, too——

They melted away, he could see his clothes over a chair, the faint glimmer of the looking-glass in the light from the hall. It glimmered like water—water gently rocking the boat in which he sat fishing. Suddenly the red bob in the circle of bright water wobbled and went under—a bite! And there, jerking and leaping at the end of his line, was a tiny Mr. Lacey, grey suit, brown sidewhiskers, geranium buttonhole, streaming wet and jerking on the hook as if he were dancing the Highland fling. Funny little Mr. Lacey! But, lying kicking in the bottom of the boat, he began to grow, to swell, blotting out the river, blotting out the sky; and screaming with laughter he began rocking the boat from side to side—further—further—until the water came pouring in——

Victor wrenched himself back into full consciousness, calling "*Mamma!*" But no use to call for Mamma—she was in the garden with Mr. Lacey, and

Lily and May said she was going to get married and be with him always. The waking dreams crept back, knitted together with the heat, the sound of the night insects, the sheet all screwed up into humps and ridges, his stomach that felt so sick no matter how hard he hugged his knees against it, his hot head that swelled up and floated off like a balloon.

And then Mamma really came. She put down her candle, and the moths began to fly around it crazily. Her shadow and Victor's streamed up the side of the wall, tremulous and huge. She knelt by the bed and put her arms around his body that stiffened under her touch.

"Oh, you naughty boy, you ought to be sound asleep!" But she was glad he wasn't, really. Bright tears went slipping down over the brightness of her smile.

"Victor, dearest little boy, I have some news for you, something that's going to make Mamma and all of us so happy. Look, Mamma's crying, but it's only because she's so happy—isn't that silly? You're going to have a new Papa—won't that be lovely, darling? A dear new Papa to love us all and take care of us—Mr. Lacey——"

Victor was as rigid as iron. His face, his large ears, his thin little neck turned scarlet. His whole body was scarlet under his nightshirt. And suddenly like a cork flying out of a bottle a loud "*No!*" burst from him, and another and another. She couldn't soothe

him, she couldn't stop him. Scarlet, furious, he went on crying "No! No! No! No!" as if his cries were torn out of him by terror and despair.

"Hush, darling, hush! He wants to take us all across the ocean in a great big ship, as big as this *house*—won't that be fun? Perhaps we'll see a whale! Think of that! And Mamma will love Victor a thousand *thousand* times as much as ever——"

She tightened her arms about him, she tried to draw his head down on her breast, rocking back and forth with broken murmurs of "sh-sh, sh-sh." But nothing would stop those tearing cries.

And at last she promised. He was safe. He lay in the big chair by the window, exhausted, giving now and then a long shuddering sob—but safe, safe! Mamma had promised.

She washed his hot face with cool water and cologne, she took off his hot, rumpled nightie and put on a fresh one. Sitting there while she made his bed with fresh cool sheets he heard a cock crow far away, and saw a faint streak of light along the river.

In bed again—so cool, so still—no sound but a June-bug bumbling against the ceiling. Funny old June-bug! He tried to lift a hand to make sure that Mamma was still there, but his arms, his legs, all his body had turned into yards and yards of silk the color of the river in the moonlight, flowing in such soft folds and billows in his cool fresh bed. He felt something wet fall on his face, and just managed a faint

"Mamma!" before the cool silver depths closed over him.

Next morning Mamma was all washed white, like a flower that has been rained on and rained on and rained on. Only her poor eyes and nose were pink, as if her pretty pink cheeks had run in the wash and streaked and stained all the wrong places. All morning she sat at Papa's desk between the dining-room windows, writing and tearing up, writing and tearing up, and at last Albert was sent off with a note, and with Brownie, but not the gloxinias, which hadn't done very well. Mamma put Mr. Lacey's letter and one velvety dark gloxinia bell into her Bible, and for a long time she cried whenever she looked at them. She never saw Mr. Lacey again.

Chapter Twelve

MISS HESSIE FARLEY was going to be Airy Fairy Lilian in half a minute, and was in a panic because she couldn't find her blue scarf and parasol anywhere. Mrs. Farley, who was helping behind the scenes, asked, "Why didn't you hold on to them?" and tears of fury sprang to her daughter's eyes. While the ladies seethed, Mr. Bates and Prentice Page stood ready to pull back the hitchy curtains, and had a good look at the audience through the sides. Flap, flap, flap went the fans, like flapping wings all over the hall, but the birds were too heavy to rise.

It was Maggie, just through being Mariana in the Moated Grange in a draped crimson portière with her back hair flowing, who saw a pale blue tail hanging down from Aunt Priscilla, sitting on a box. The parasol was under her, too. Airy Fairy Lilian took up her position and put on her smile, the curtains hitched back, and there was another of the Tennyson Tableaux.

They were to raise money to buy a new melodeon for the Sunday school, and everyone was helping. Aunt Priscilla was old Mother Hubbard—not that

that was Tennyson, but she always was Mother Hubbard, whatever the tableaux were. She had her costume—a chintz skirt with poppies on it, a red sateen lace-up-the-front bodice, and Willie's mother's straw poke-bonnet trimmed with tea-colored ribbons. It did for Martha Washington, too, at fancy-dress parties, or, if she left off the poke bonnet and floured her hair, for Marie Antoinette. But she liked to be Mother Hubbard because she had taught her terrier Tiny to sit up and beg, and he could be Mother Hubbard's Dog. Every time anything was planned someone said, "Now *this* time we really *can't* have Mrs. Willie Campion as Mother Hubbard, and somebody just must tell her so, that's all there is about it!" But what were they to do when she said timidly and eagerly, "Do you want Tiny and me to be Mother Hubbard and her Dog? It wouldn't be a bit of trouble, if you do, because I have my costume."

Mrs. Webster sang "Sweet and Low" with such tremolo it seemed as if the staff and the stems of the notes on her sheet of music must be scalloped instead of straight; and Mr. Bates' voice welling out in "Break, break, break" made the ladies sigh and smile.

> " 'But the tender grace of a day that is dead
> Will never come back to me.' "

Mamma, sitting in the audience between Victor and Lily, thought of a summer night three years ago,

Where was he now? The tears welled into her flower-blue eyes. But soon she had to laugh, for Carrie Trotter was giving a recitation from "The Widow Bedott Papers"—such a comical one about pumpkin pie. Of course, that wasn't Tennyson either, but then it didn't do to be too particular.

The curtain jerked back again—oh, what a charming tableau! Fannie Leaf and Prentice Page were "Come Into the Garden, Maud," and they had rented a rustic gate from a photographer in Wilmington, and twined real climbing roses over it. Fannie knew how pretty she looked under the roses, in her pink satin and Roman pearls, and she felt so happy that she couldn't keep from laughing. She shook so that the arch shook, too, and some of the petals came drifting down and caught in her yellow curls.

The last tableau was the loveliest of all, "The Lady of Shalott." May was the Lady, lying all in white on packing boxes covered with draperies. She had Mamma's white satin wedding slippers on her little feet, and on her breast beneath her crossed hands lay all the Ascension lilies from the garden, sacrificed by Mamma for this great hour. Edward Post was Sir Lancelot in a Tam o' Shanter with a plume from his Aunt Jo's best hat; and Robert Leaf was the Dumb Oarsman (for they had mixed in some of Lancelot and Elaine) in Fannie's tan cape, with the packing-box draperies arranged to hide his boots and trousers.

"'But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott,"'"

read Mrs. Allen with great expression; and May was so beautiful that Lily wept unrestrainedly, and Edward Post looked down at her as if he really loved her.

But she couldn't get him to sound as if he had when she tried, ever so hard, afterward, while Mrs. Webster and Mr. Bates finished things up with a duet of "Tears, Idle Tears" and Maggie helped poor Aunt Priscilla hunt for the slippers she had kicked off in a moment of relaxation.

"What were you thinking about while our tableau was going on?"

"About a fly that was tickling my nose. What were you?"

"I shan't tell you." (A fly, indeed!)

"Oh, come on!"

"You'd just laugh."

("'So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more'"

warbled Mrs. Webster, boomed Mr. Bates.)

"I know I must have looked perfectly *crazy*——"

"I know what you're fishing for, young lady, and it won't hurt you to work a little for it," thought Edward, and added aloud cruelly:

"Who's that pretty girl in pink?" He was a new

young man, and had just come to live with his Aunt Jo and Uncle Henry Allen while he worked in Wilmington.

"Which one? *Oh!* Oh, you mean her? That's Fannie Leaf. Do you think she's pretty? Goodness, men are funny!"

And she laughed, but she looked so much as if she would rather cry that he decided she should have her compliment at once.

"Yes, I think she's pretty as a picture—I think she's the second prettiest girl here."

"Who's the prettiest?" asked May, reviving like a wilted flower put into water, and trying to look as if she couldn't guess.

"Don't you really know?"

"May, you haven't seen Aunt Priscilla's slippers, have you?" asked Maggie, coming up.

"My sister Maggie, Mr. Post."

> "'——deep as love,
> Deep as first love, and wild with all regret,'"

sang Mrs. Webster and Mr. Bates.

"How do you do, Mr. Post. Have you, May? She took them off because they were so tight——" She moved away.

"Mercy, I wish *these* slippers were too tight! They've been falling off all evening!"

"That's because you have such tiny feet."

"Oh, now you're making fun of me——"

He took her out to the carriage. She was dreadfully excited. Mamma tried to put a sensible wrap about her gleaming shoulders, but she twitched it off impatiently.

"Oh, *Mamma!* I don't need that!"

(To put a stuffy old cape about moon-silver and lilies! She lifted her face a little, to the stars.)

"There's a chill in the night air, honey. Well, goodnight, Mr.—er—goodnight! *What's* the young man's name, May?"

"Sh, Mamma! He'll hear you. Post. He's the Henry Allens' nephew."

"I thought Stewy Grant was going to be Sir Lancelot."

"He fell out of a cherry tree this morning and knocked out a front tooth, so he wouldn't, and Mrs. Allen got Mr. Post. He's coming over for archery on the lawn next Saturday afternoon."

Already she was walking down the aisle on his arm—shimmer of satin, foam of lace, and an armful of lilies. They left the church, they entered the carriage. He and she, alone.

"*You were carrying lilies when first I saw you—do you remember?*"

"*I remember, my Lancelot!*"

"*My pure, white lily—my wife!*"

And Mamma, as she answered, "That will be very nice, pet," was holding her first grandchild in her arms.

"We'll make some ice-cream to have when you finish your archery."

"Oh, Mamma, *no!*" May's voice was anguished. "Goodness, what would he *think?*"

"He'd think it was very nice, if I know anything about boys."

"Oh, Mamma, he isn't a *boy!* And he'd think we were so *crazy* about having him come——!"

"But, honey, we could just act as if we were going to have it for supper anyway."

"Oh, *no*——!"

"All right, we needn't have it, I'm sure! I just wanted to make things pleasant for your friends." Mamma was dignified, but tears were near.

"May, I think you're horrid when Mamma plans a treat for you," Maggie said severely.

"Well, I know, it's lovely of Mamma, but he'd think we *cared* whether he came or not!"

"And *you* don't care! Oh, my, no! Oh, I guess not!" jeered Victor.

"May's got a beau,
Oh, oh, oh,
May's got a beau
Oh, oh, oh!"

"Mamma! Make him *stop!* He thinks he's so funny!" May wailed, and burst into a storm of tears.

Old Major ambled along. It was late, so late that the toll-gate was lifted for the night, and Lily was

fast asleep in the back of the carriage. Maggie was driving. They didn't like to keep Albert up now that he had all the work to do.

" 'Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,' "

Maggie sang to herself, silently, inside her head. Then she thought of Aunt Priscilla and her pale blue tail. May was still shaking with sobs—what had been the matter with them all? Such a fuss about that Mr. Post—but she was ashamed of herself for having been so cross and bossy.

The sky was swarming with stars—so many, so bright, it made you feel—oh—funny, to look at them. *Mm-m*, how sweet! Those were the mock-orange bushes in Miss Perry's yard. Queer how their fragrance made you feel so happy and yet as if you wanted to cry at the same time. Another smell, not so nice—the tavern pig-pen. Pee-*yugh!*

Chapter Thirteen

HE came on Saturday afternoon long before anyone expected him. Mamma was lying down, May was tying a rose-colored velvet ribbon around her curls, and Maggie, who had been helping Martha preserve strawberries, was trying to get the stains off her fingers with the grated lemon rinds left from the lemon-icing cake Mamma had made that morning. It was Lily, strolling around the corner from the kitchen with her mouth full of buttered biscuit, who saw him on his bicycle with the huge front wheel and the tiny back one come wobbling up the drive between the pine trees.

"Is this the Campions' house?" he shouted.

Lily, crimson with embarrassment, made muffled sounds and would have run away, if Edward hadn't fallen off cheerfully into a bed of peonies.

"My bicycle's new, and I don't know how to ride it very well yet. I hope you'll excuse my smashing your flowers."

Lily swallowed her mouthful of biscuit with a gulp that forced the tears into her eyes, and became vehement through shyness.

"Oh, my yes, we *hate* those peonies. Mamma'll be *glad* you fell off in them—oh, I didn't mean *that!* I

mean she hates *these*, we *all* do, the pretty ones are all down in the garden, the big white ones with the pink bottoms——"

Oh, what had *possessed* her? What would he *think* of her? As soon as the others came down, she rushed off and flung herself into a game of solitary croquet, pretending to be deeply absorbed, and passing from one agony of blushes to another.

They had set up a target on the lawn near the beech tree. Edward and May shot against Maggie and Victor, and Mamma sat in a rustic chair, watching them, chaperoning the young people. The pleated ruffles of her skirt flowed out on the grass beside her, crisp fan after fan. In her spreading white, with her cooing voice, she was like one of Victor's pigeons. How nice the girls looked, she thought, in their tight basques and three-ruffled skirts, their bustles, and sashes, their trains and long tight sleeves. Fashions had never been so pretty. Nobody would have dreamed that Maggie's tobacco-brown dress had started life as a crinoline skirt of Aunt Priscilla's. But how sunburned the child was! She must wear her hat more, and rub cucumbers on her face at night.

Maggie shot well when she got over trying to hide her stained fingers. Edward had to work hard to beat her. He looked at her with dawning interest as she drew her bow. Her straight, strong body in its tight brown sheath, like a young tree; her face, the golden rose of peaches above the white of her stiff

little linen turn-back collar; her hair in a thick bang over her dark eyebrows and clear light eyes.

Over and over again May had to jerk him back to her.

"Oh! Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, a *bee!* Oh, make it go away!"

But she was really calling:

"Come back to me! Don't be Maggie's! Come back to me!"

For she was nineteen, a whole year older than Mamma had been when she was married, and she was terrified sometimes for fear life had passed her by.

When they were tired of archery, they went up on the porch and ate cherries. Albert had brought a big basket of them, great shining black worlds, each bursting with the sun, the rain, the earth; each holding hidden in its seed a tree with roots and branches, with snowdrifts of blossoms, and green leaves, and a universe of crimson black worlds each hiding in its heart another tree.

"Just throw your stones into the lily-of-the-valley bed—we always do," said Maggie. She and Edward ate their cherries, ever so many of them. May put hers on for ear-rings, and decorated Edward, too; and Victor threw his into the air and caught them in his mouth.

Mamma had slipped away, and presently there came a tinkling, and she brought out a frosty pitcher of

raspberry shrub, and the fresh lemon-icing cake. She and May tried to act as if it happened every afternoon, but Victor, who was showing off by walking on the porch railing, nearly fell over in his delight, and shouted rapturously to the round blue figure knocking the croquet balls about.

"Lil-lee!"

"What-ee?"

"Cake and raspberry shru-hub!"

Conversation, that had been wandering happy and silly and free, resumed its ball and chain.

"This is a wonderful view of the river you have, Mrs. Campion."

"Yes, we're very fond of our view. Do you like Delaware, Mr. Cobb?"

"Mr. *Post*, Mamma!"

"Oh, me! How silly of me! What do you suppose made me call you Mr. Cobb? Of course, there was Papa's friend with the red hair who had the race-horses, Carrot-Top Cobb they used to call him; but you aren't a bit like him, with your dark hair and everything. Heigho! I haven't thought of him for years—let me fill your glass. Do you think that you're going to like Delaware?"

"Yes, indeed, thank you, though I haven't seen much of it yet. Do you go to Wilmington often?"

"Well, not *very* often. Victor goes to school every day on the steam-cars, to Rugby Academy, but, of

course, not in summer; and the girls have some very pleasant friends in town, haven't you, girls?"

"Yes, Mamma."

"But it's a long drive, and we find plenty to do out here. Oh, yes, you must, just a *little* piece! But we always drive in once a week to market—Victor, precious! I *wouldn't* eat any more, darling; you'll spoil your supper! No, honey, Mamma said *no*—well, just a teeny piece. We generally go Saturday, but this week we went Wednesday, so we didn't go this morning."

"Aunt Jo drove in."

"How is your aunty, Mr. Cobb?"

"Mr. *Post*, Mamma."

Presently he had to go, and they all went out on the front porch to watch him climb up on his bicycle. Victor and Maggie saw themselves skimming along on it with the clouds foaming about their heads; Mamma and May said the very notion made them feel faint; and Lily, blushing, tried not to look at the crushed peonies.

"Goodbye," Edward said to Maggie, smiling at her, taking her hand in his.

What is happening? What is this feeling that floods them both? Two drops of water touch, and are one.

It was the most wonderful summer. The Sun said, "Lift up your hearts," and the flowers answered, "We

lift them up unto the Lord." The big creamy roses had never been so fragrant, the river had never been so blue, the nights had never held such swarms of stars.

They got out the Chinese lanterns, lopsided, green and yellow and raspberry red, so crushed and dusty in their box in the attic, such miracles of beauty alight and afloat in the blue summer night. By their light, they ate the watermelons they had sailed across the river for, and popped the seeds at each other.

Edward came on Sunday evening to sing hymns with the Campions. While Mamma played the accompaniments, selecting one nice chord for the bass, which she stuck to through thick and thin, he would sing so loudly, so tunelessly, with such a sweet, serious expression on his face that Maggie would melt with love and laughter. Lily taught him to play chopsticks on the piano, and his Aunt Jo complained to Mamma that she was nearly driven crazy by his practicing.

Fourth of July! Victor was up before the sun, exploding his torpedoes on the bricks by the kitchen shed. That last one, found in the sawdust when he thought he had used them all! It sounded twice as loud as any.

Every now and then he had to go into the house to look at the rockets and Roman candles, lying there wrapped in lovely pastel colors, waiting for darkness. Then out again. The red and gold of the firecracker packages were as exciting as clashing Chinese gongs,

and sometimes braided in with the bunches of red firecrackers was a yellow one, or a green one. Bang! Bang! And there was his toy pistol, and the round brown cardboard boxes full of magneta caps. Bang! Mamma lay in her darkened room with a handkerchief wet with eau-de-cologne on her forehead, and saw Victor with his right hand torn off—Victor blinded.

May gathered red and white Sweet-William and blue cornflowers for the dining-room table; and Albert made a big freezer of raspberry water-ice for the evening, when the Blows, and the Willie Campions, and Mr. and Mrs. Allen and Edward Post were coming for the fireworks.

The light never lingered so long as on Fourth of July; but at last it grew dark.

"Victor! *Victor!* Oh, honey, be careful!"

"It's only a Roman candle, Mamma!"

"I won't let him blow himself up, Mrs. Campion."

"Oh, dear! Are you sure that it's safe? Take care of him, Edward!"

(*Take care of my darling, take care of my life and my love!*)

The Roman candles burst softly into balls of ice-green, rose and blue. Over by the hedge were white flashes of teeth and rolling eyes, black faces melting into the night, soft voices full of sad cadences, broken by sudden yells of laughter, quickly hushed because of the white folks further up on the lawn.

Rushing up, tearing the darkness, the rockets ascended unto heaven, burst, spread into ferns of fire, blossomed into golden stars and tears that floated, melted, and were gone.

"Maggie? Where is Maggie?"

"Here I am, Edward."

That was all he needed. He must be sure she was there, feeling everything with him.

Edward persuaded them to go bathing in the river at high tide. The girls used the boathouse as a dressing-room, sitting on the edge of the wobbly gunning-skiff. The boathouse was musty-smelling and dark, but through the cracks between the boards you could see the blue river dancing. There were old starch boxes full of cartridge shells, and wooden decoy ducks, some without their heads, that had belonged to Papa. Lily was afraid of the wasps that built their nests in the corners, but May was never afraid of them unless she was with a young man.

Getting out of their tight dresses, their shoes and stockings, stepping from circle after circle of petticoat, calling "Don't look!" to each other, as they took off corset covers, drawers, corsets shaped like hour-glasses, chemises, and long ribbed shirts, getting into their blue flannel bathing-suits with the white braid on the sailor collars stained *café au lait* by the river, they felt like butterflies, light, free as air, escaped from their thick cocoons.

Maggie could swim a little, and so could Victor,

though for Mamma he drowned each day they bathed. Lily pretended to swim, but she was really hopping along with one foot on the bottom. But May wanted Edward to teach her.

"Oh! Oh! Edward! Oh, I'm going down! Oh, don't let me go down!"

He disentangled her clinging arms.

"Now look here, May, do you want to learn, or don't you? *Kick!* Pull up! *Kick!* Pull up! Keep your head down and imagine you're a frog."

A frog! The little mermaid floats in the foam, the Lady of Shalott drifts down the river, and all the prince sees, all Sir Lancelot sees, is a frog!

So she gave up bathing in the dirty old river; and, because she was unhappy, became disagreeable and distant, until she began an affair with a new young man named Ralph Wither, who taught her the names of the stars.

They all went crabbing after supper on the tremulous pier that ran out from Uncle Willie's boathouse. The blue crabs scrabbled and waved their claws in the old peach-baskets, the river clucked coolly under the pier, and May cried:

"Oh, Ralph! Help me! Oh, I've got such a big old one I'm frightened to death!"

"I don't see why you're so scared of the crabs, May. You never used to be," said Lily, who always thought that what people said and what they meant were the same.

The Perennial Bachelor

Edward and Maggie sat together, swinging their feet over the water. A light warm wind flowed over them, and up from the grey river into the grey sky floated an enormous apricot-pink moon. Silently they watched it, and then looked at each other, smiling faintly.

Chapter Fourteen

NOW that they could only afford to keep Albert outside and Martha in the house, Mamma and the girls had ever so much more to do. They even had to let lame Joseph go. He had swept the porches and limped around the table in his white house-jacket; as Mamma said, he was awkward and slow, but he *did*. But they really couldn't afford him any more.

And Martha wasn't what she used to be. Whenever the weather was hot she groaned and held her side and mumbled so Mamma couldn't understand a word.

"What, Martha?"

"Ah doan feel right good. Ah done got a misery."

"Where is it? Does your head ache?"

"No, ma'am, taint ezzackly mah *haid*, but Ah doan feel like puttin' out much today."

"None of us do in this hot weather, but you don't hear Miss Maggie and me going on as if we were dying."

Mumble.

"What, Martha?"

But all you could hear was grumble, mumble, grumble. You couldn't be sure she was being impertinent, but then you couldn't be sure she wasn't. She

had been so cross and disobliging this morning that Mamma had punished her by making the piccalilli herself, with Maggie's help.

Oh, what a day! The flies crawled ticklingly over their faces or buzzed despairingly from the saucer of molasses Martha had put on the window-sill to catch them—poor things, how they struggled. Mamma's face was crimson and wet as she bent over the hot stove, wiping her forehead with the back of her wrist, and her head buzzed like a thousand flies. Maggie chopped cabbages and peppers until her hands were shaking, carried left-overs out to the pig-bucket—*pugh!*—and felt as if the whole house was a bubbling pot of piccalilli, with herself boiling in the midst.

Later that afternoon, when the jars were all filled, she and Edward lay in canvas chairs under the pear tree. It was so hot, so still, a storm was coming. Pears had fallen in the grass, some of the ripest had burst, and wasps crawled over them. She was tired and languid, not only from her morning over the stove. Even the still air was heavy, pressing them down in their chairs, pressing the pears down on the grass until the juice ran out of their broken sides.

"Look, Maggie," said Edward, speaking slowly, like someone half asleep. A butterfly, blue in the sunshine, black in shadow, had drifted through the heat and settled on a spot of squashed pear. She answered him—or did she? She was heavy with love for him as

the yellow pears in the tree were heavy with sweetness. When he took her in his arms, she was so weak she could not have stood without him. His lips moved slowly over her face.

A blue-black curtain of clouds rolled over the sky, the wind turned the river to lead, flattened the grass in the fields, pelted down the pears. Up at the house shutters were banging, people were running to the windows, slamming them down before the storm should break. The wind kindled Maggie's cheeks, strained back her thin, dark blue dress until she was a flying victory. And now she was all alive again, and light as a mounting flame, and Edward too was flaming——

" 'Je-ru-sa-lem the go-ol-den,' "

boomed Mr. Bates, up and down—*much* too loud, thought Miss Martin at the organ, it really drowned out all the rest of the choir. Something tactful would have to be said again—oh dear!

" 'With milk and honey blest——' "

The choir was marching out. Stewy Grant wondered if he could possibly hold in his sneeze until they got into the robing room—those wild asters and golden-rod sprays on the altar!

" 'Beneath thy contem-pla-shuhun——' "

That was where Mrs. Webster's voice soared higher than the steeple!

" 'Sink heart and voice oppress.' "

Then, muted by the closed door, "A-men," and Stewy's sneeze. Mumble, mumble, mumble, and then another "A-men." Miss Martin set the organ pealing, and the congregation could lift up its heads from the pew backs and go out into the sunshine.

Mamma was ashamed of herself—or at least she knew she ought to be—but she hadn't heard a word of the sermon, for thinking of Edward and Maggie, and they had wandered even into the prayers and the benediction. She held quite a reception on the church lawn.

"Yes, indeed, we're very much pleased," said she. "Of course, it's sad to lose a daughter; but as you say, I'll be gaining a—— Good morning, Mrs. Farley, isn't it a lovely morning? Good morning, Hessie dear, how sweet you look! I never saw such a girl—a new dress every time I see you. Yes, indeed, we're very much pleased, he's a very dear boy. Good morning, Mr. Leaf. Yes, indeed. They're walking home—yes, we're very fond of him. I don't know what I'll do without her, but then—oh, not until next autumn *any*-way. Lily pet, run back and see if Mamma left her fan in the pew—*oop!*—don't fall over your feet, honey. Good morning, Miss Martin! Thank you! Yes, indeed——!"

"Goodness! You'd think nobody in the world had ever got engaged before," Miss Hessie Farley said gloomily to Mrs. Farley as they walked away. "Such a *fuss*——!"

"Oh, yes, he's *nice*, but can you i*mag*ine feeling sentimental about him?" May asked her friends.

Poor Aunt Priscilla said it was exactly like Willie and her all over again, and offered her grandmother's lace wedding-veil. But she couldn't find it anywhere, until—*pop!*—while she was screaming, "Work, for the night is coming," in Sunday school, she remembered that she had put it over some plates of caramels up in the attic to keep off the flies. She had made them for a surprise for Willie, that's why she'd hidden them up there; and then, of course, she'd forgotten them. She was so afraid she'd forget again that she kept saying, "Caramels—caramels," to herself all through the psalms, all through the sermon.

"Hear my prayer, O Lord: (caramels) and let my crying come unto thee.

"Hide not thy (caramels) face from me in the time of my trouble: incline thine ear unto me when I call; (caramels, caramels, caramels)."

They had been there nearly a year, so they probably wouldn't be very good. Still, it wouldn't hurt just to try them.

The mice had tried them, and tried the veil, too. But May, who was clever with her needle, mended it so that you wouldn't have known.

Victor was pleased with the engagement because he thought now he could ride Edward's bicycle.

"Margaret drove over to announce the forthcoming nuptials," Cousin Lizzie said to Cousin Sam. "That means a silver tea-set. Really, the woman's ridiculous! They haven't a penny between them, and she was clucking like old Speckle when she's laid an egg!"

Mamma had tried to make Maggie and Edward drive to the Blows with her, but they escaped to the autumn garden. He was trying to learn the names of the flowers because she loved them so.

"Chrysanthemum, Edward."

"Chrysanthemum. What's this brown one?"

"Chrysanthemum, too. Zinnia."

"Zinnia. Oh, Maggie, you beautiful girl!"

Her heart cried, "Oh, darling, darling, *darling*, say it again!" But aloud she said scornfully:

"You must enjoy hearing yourself talk!"

"And what's this?"

"A zinnia, just the same as it was two minutes ago."

And they looked at each other laughing, shining with inward light. They were always laughing—laughter charged with excitement, laughter that left them trembling.

"What's the joke, children?"

"Nothing, Mamma, really and *truly* there isn't any joke."

And there wasn't, but Mamma could never believe it, and her feelings were dreadfully hurt. But they

couldn't stop. Sitting in church, going to supper at the Blows, they didn't dare look at each other, because they were bursting to laugh.

He laughed at her, and she loved it, even when he laughed at things she meant perfectly seriously. Because he never laughed at the wrong things. He understood so wonderfully that sometimes she thought she was dying of happiness. When she told him, shy, even with him, the things other people would have waited for her to finish—the word, the broken sentence —the tears came into her eyes as he answered, "I know, my darling."

Even when they fought, when they were furious at each other, they felt as if sparkles and flames were running over them, leaping towards each other.

Lily couldn't understand it at all. She thought when people were engaged they exchanged locks of hair and held each other's hands. Two pale pink hearts tied together with a pale blue ribbon. How *could* Edward and Maggie talk to each other the way they did?

"It's tremendously stimulating," Edward explained.

"Edward makes me so *mad!*" added Maggie. They smiled at each other, and again the invisible lightning leapt.

"You mustn't be so selfish, children," Mamma reproved them. "You mustn't grumble so when people ask you out. It's very kind of them."

So they went to evening parties; and Mamma,

beaming, handed Edward around like a plate of delicious cake.

"Mrs. Holly, this is Mr. Post! Cousin Jennie, I want you to know Edward——"

And Maggie, in her flounced and frilled white ball gown with a bodice like a black satin corset, was saying:

"Thank you—thank you ever so much. Yes, isn't he? We don't know yet. Thank you, Cousin Jennie. Yes, indeed, I am. Oh, not for ever so long."

"Maggie, hurry up! Stop talking and come!" And his voice sounded quite desperate. Oh, together again! "The Blue Danube"—how sad, how sweet! Was she going to disgrace herself by crying at a party?

"Edward——"

"Yes, darling, I know."

But sometimes, when he talked to Cousin Sam and Uncle Willie about fishing and shooting, he looked so interested, so absorbed, that she thought, "This is his real life; this is what really interests him." Sadness and loneliness covered her, darkening the light. And then to find that he had suffered as much as she all those hours, those years, when they were not alone together!

One Sunday in spring a late snow fell, light and wet, so that everything was deep in swansdown. The scillas were already in bloom, and she cleared the snow from them to show him, while the flakes still sifted from the grey sky, melting on their cheeks.

He hardly looked at them, but why did the patch of blue flowers in the white snow make her so happy? And why did old Mrs. Latter suddenly pop into her head—old Mrs. Latter, who had been dead for years? She hadn't thought of her since the day Mamma took her there when she was a little bit of a girl—how long ago? But now she saw the wrinkled, white cheeks like crumpled tissue-paper, with their big spots of moth-wing brown; smelled cologne——

What was it? She *must* remember—she mustn't lose it. It was something that mattered tremendously to Edward and to her.

And just as she gave up, came the feeling of soft little hands on her heart, light as the touch of the snow. And through all the years between she saw, hanging on Mrs. Latter's wall, the circle of scilla-blue, the circle of Heaven, and the snow-white baby holding his arms wide open—waiting for her, holding out his hands to be taken.

One evening at the supper table Maggie said, too casually, too airily:

"Edward's going out West."

"*No!*" said Mamma. Lily stopped mopping up the chicken gravy with her bread, and stared with round blue eyes and round pink mouth.

"The company never sent such a young man before —and it means quite a lot more salary."

"Then you can get married sooner," May said, smiling at her.

"Yes!" Oh, darling May! Maggie's heart glowed with gratitude.

"Poor little girl," said Mamma.

"I want him to go! He asked me if he should, and I told him to go."

"Don't you *mind?*" asked Lily.

(*"I have been sentenced to death next week."*

"Don't you mind?")

"Would he like us to keep his bicycle for him?" Victor suggested in a small respectful voice. "I'd keep it oiled and everything, and I wouldn't ride it and I wouldn't let Jake ride it either. You ask him, Maggie."

Under the table Maggie squeezed her brother's hand. The *darling!*

But she didn't realize that Edward was really going, as day after day went by, until tomorrow was the day.

Here he was, here, his coat, his cheek, his hair, here to be touched and felt, his arms holding her close. Now he is here! Tomorrow he will be gone. How can it be possible that of their own volition they will part, he will go, she will stay?

When she was in his arms, he felt as if he would never dare let her go. Suppose he should lose her. A bird lies in your hands, yours to keep for always. But open your hands and the bird is lost in the sky, and, if you wait forever, your hands will still be empty.

"Maggie—it won't be so terribly long——"

"It won't be—a bit——" She turned her head away and bent down a branch of the snowball bush, broke off a still green snowball, and slowly, carefully, began to pull it apart and make little heaps of the blossoms on the bench beside her, three in each heap. A tear splashed down beside them.

"You're crying!"

"I'm not!" She turned to show him she wasn't, tears streaming over her face, her body shaken by tearing sobs.

"Mag-gie! Oh, Mag-gie!"

From the porch Victor's voice calling her. Then louder—then far away.

"Mag-gie!"

"Maggie, Maggie, promise you'll always love me!"

Oh, she could promise that! She could even laugh as she promised.

"Maggie, where are you?"

"Here, Victor."

"Oh!" The voice came to a standstill behind a hedge, sympathetically distant. "Well, Mamma said to tell you you must come in, she says to tell you it's getting very chilly and you have a cold."

"All right, we're coming."

Edward went down on the grass at her feet, clinging to her, burying his face on her knees. Night was coming, and lifting her lips from the dear head, the dark

head, she saw each star in the sky change to a cross through her tears.

The family went to bed early, so that Maggie and Edward could be alone for their last, aching goodbyes. But Mamma couldn't sleep. For the third time she lit her candle, and looked at Papa's big watch that hung in the beaded pocket at the head of the bed. It was dreadfully late. He ought to have gone home ever so long ago.

"Well, I'm not going to worry about them," she told herself. But she lay rigid, almost afraid to breathe, waiting for the sound of the front door closing and Maggie climbing the creaking stairs.

The house was coming alive—here a whisper, there a patter, not of mice nor of rain. It was breathing, you could hear it sigh.

"Perhaps he's gone home without my hearing," thought Mamma. "Anyway, I'm just going quietly to sleep."

So she got up and stole out into the hall and sat down on the blanket box at the top of the stairs. There wasn't a sound, but the lamp in the downstairs hall was still burning, and by leaning over she could see his hat lying on the sofa. This was nonsense! *Such* an hour! What were those crazy children thinking of? She would just call over the stairs——

What made the whole house feel so strange, trembling and alive? The banister seemed to quiver under her hand. The ticking of the clock on the stairs

sounded like water falling, drop by drop—water that could never be gathered up again.

Cautiously, silently, she got up, avoided the squeaking board, went back into her room, and closed the door.

Chapter Fifteen

EVEN Willie said the new cook was good. When he finished his second cup of coffee and said, "I've only had one cup, haven't I?" Aunt Priscilla was so pleased that she told a story, and said, "Yes, just one," as she poured out his third. Think of it! Three cups, when usually he only tasted it and pushed it aside.

"Isn't your coffee all right, Willie?" she would ask him anxiously, and he would answer:

"Coffee, my dear? Oh—do you mean my cup of warmish dish-water?"

Three cups of coffee and two helps of fried chicken and three *big* pieces of cornbread, and when he finished breakfast he smiled and patted her cheek.

She felt so happy, like a good little girl who has been praised. When he went out, she got down on her knees in the dining-room, with her head on his chair, while flies buzzed around her and the parrot screamed, "Will-*lee!* Hello! Want a crack-*kah?* Hello! Oh dear!"

"Our Father which art in Heaven, thank thee *ever* so much for making Cobina a good cook and thank thee for Willie. Amen."

She must do something nice for somebody, she felt so happy. The peaches were ripe on her own peach

tree, the tree Willie had planted on her first birthday after they were married. She loved her little peach tree—its pink blooming in spring was one of the few things that pierced through the mist that surrounded her, and its peaches were much better than any other peaches. Who should she take them to? Mrs. Holly must be ill, she hadn't been in church on Sunday. And although the Hollys had dozens of peach trees, Aunt Priscilla filled her basket, wobbling on a kitchen chair. Beautiful miracles of pink and yellow velvet! She could have kissed each one. She did kiss the little tree, softly and shyly, and then looked around in a panic to make sure Washington hadn't seen her.

She came home from the Hollys walking on air. Over the brook—my *good*ness, what wobbly stepping stones! Suppose she sat down in the water, wouldn't those water-spiders be surprised, and the small fish slipping about like shadows? So cool, so clear, for two pins she'd go in paddling. That bright, bright moss at the side with the crystal runlets of water trickling over it, reminded her of the green velvet dress with the crystal beading that Willie had liked, ever so long ago.

Mushrooms! Growing in long white drifts on the short green grass of the pasture. She began to fill her basket, empty now except for its permanent contents of a key that had long ago lost its door, with a bit of dingy red ribbon tied to it; a paper screw of seeds (seeds of what? She hadn't the least idea); an elderly

list of blurred pencilling, headed "*Must do*"; and a few twists of grubby string. Transient knitting, Christmas cookies, eggs, mail, fruit, and flowers covered them from time to time, but these old residents remained unmoved.

Most of the mushrooms were too old, after all, black and wormy. She got enough big brown-lined umbrellas for a nice little dish, but she couldn't find any of the silky white ones with the pink linings like the basketful Margaret and the girls brought her last week.

Then, by the edge of the wood, she saw the most beautiful one, all by itself, and further on, another. More beautiful than any of Margaret's, all silvery, inside and out. She found five before she was through. They gleamed against the shadows of the wood, beautiful, lonely, and white—angels of death.

And then she thought, why not stop and ask Margaret to lunch? Because she loved mushrooms, and here they were, and there was Cobina to cook them.

"Really, Priscilla, she's a treasure!"

"Willie says so, too," said Aunt Priscilla, beaming. "No, the mushrooms are all for you—they cook down so, don't they? No, really, I never want anything else when I have corn-fritters, and Cobina says she wouldn't be paid to eat them. Toads, she calls them —did you ever? Short for toadstools, I guess. Now

take them all or I'll feel bad, I gathered them especially for you. Co-o-*bina!* Oh, Cobina, you might just let us have a few more of the corn-fritters—do you think she looks all right? She's so black it's sort of hard to tell, isn't it?"

"She's better than Lizzie's wonderful fancy cook," said Mamma, mopping up the mushroom gravy on her biscuit. "What's the matter with Lizzie, anyway, Priscilla? She's acting very queer lately—just *half* a cup—oh, you bad girl, I said half!"

"Don't tell, but Willie thinks she's going crazy!" Aunt Priscilla's eyes looked like pale blue glass marbles ready to pop out of her head. "He went over last Tuesday—was it Tuesday? What day was it the old peddler woman came? Anyway, he wanted Sam to go down state after reedbirds with him, and he said you could hear Lizzie screaming clear out on the road; and, when he got up to the house, he heard Sam sort of yell, 'You'd better be careful, my lady, or I'll lock you up, that's what I'll do!' It made Willie feel so queer he never stopped at all—here, let me take away your plate, and I'll get some chocolate cake." She opened the lower doors of her husband's desk, where she kept the cake box, the vanilla bottle, and the broken plates with the humming-birds and morning-glories that she planned to mend some day.

"Priscilla—excuse me—it comes so quickly, this damp, warm weather—but I don't believe we'd better eat that, I'm afraid it's molded just a *little*."

"Why, so it has!" She looked at the beautiful cake, so rich and black, but with spots of mold, furry grey on the icing. "Do you think it would hurt? Well, I suppose it's better to be safe than sorry." Sadly she put the cake back in the box.

"Jo Allen has marked four dozen tea napkins for Maggie."

"Has she?" She brightened up again, sprinkled sugar thickly on a piece of bread and butter, and settled to enjoyment. "You know I was thinking this morning of a green velvet dress I had the year *I* was married—I believe if it was steamed it would make over into a right pretty sacque for Maggie. And Willie and I want to give her her greatgrandmother's silver tea-spoons. Has Lizzie given her anything yet?"

Beautiful, lonely, and white, the Angel of Death. Whiter than fire, whiter than snow, the great wings curve above Mamma, their shadow covers her. The flies buzz, the parrot says "Oh dear!" and scratches its head, Aunt Priscilla scratches her head, too, and takes a half moon bite of bread and sugar.

Mamma strolled home—the short-cut through the cornfield. The river had never been so blue. Over the stile and up through the garden—two or three

more days and the asters would be lovely—oh, such a fine plant broken! That was Victor's new puppy Bundle, bad little thing.

She stopped to gather a few nasturtiums, thinking, "I believe I could get a whole dress for Maggie out of Priscilla's green velvet if I had it open over a satin underskirt." Poor Priscilla! Such a goose, but so kind. She wouldn't harm a fly.

She paused to eat a peach, looking thoughtful and thinking of nothing. Then across the lawn and into the house. And with her went the Angel of Death.

"Stop and look at your flowers, little child, and I will wait for you. Eat your peach, there is no hurry. No need to hurry now, we are nearly there."

The house was still, for the children had gone on a picnic. She could hear her canaries hopping and swinging in their cages. How cool and fresh the darkened house was after Priscilla's sunny dusty rooms. That was a good cook, though. She had enjoyed her lunch.

Should she go and tell Martha she was home? Better not, perhaps, in case she wasn't expected so soon. It had been embarrassing all around, last week, after Martha had said there wasn't any cold duck left, to come upon her feeding it to a strange young darkie. She was forty if she was a day, too, the silly! But Mamma certainly didn't want to catch her at anything she would have to disapprove of.

She went up to her room and took off her dress. Just a little lie-down before supper.

The great wings drooped above her, closer, closer. "Go to sleep, little child. I will be here when you wake."

Every night Maggie almost prayed that Edward would come to her in her dreams. Praying was done on your knees, in churches and by bedsides, beginning properly, "Our Father" or "O Blessed Lord," and dealing in stately language with reformation or protection. Almost praying was the quick warm gush of gratitude or pleading: "Oh, *thank* you!", when Edward's letter was extra long, or "Please *please* let me dream of him," every night as she fell asleep.

But she dreamed of Mamma and the girls, of old Benny Brown with his beard in a braid, of Lossie's black baby, of Victor's new puppy—anybody, anything but Edward.

The long-nosed market-woman who always had the nice cheese and the tight bunches of marigolds and red bee-balm was sitting up in a pine tree on the drive. Knock! Knock! Knock! Maggie could see the long sharp nose sticking out from her sunbonnet as she struck it against the tree trunk like a giant woodpecker. Knock! Knock!

But she'd ruin the pine tree! Shoo!

Spreading her shawl, the market-woman flapped through the air, and settled in another tree, far off. Knock! Knock! Knock! It was fainter now.

Maggie rose from the sea of sleep and drifted, nearly awake, on the surface. The knocking came again.

She sat up in bed, listening. How queer! It came low down on her door, so low that she saw, still half-dreaming, a dwarf in the dark hall, knocking.

"Maggie——"

It was Mamma, huddled on the floor, leaning against the door.

"Oh, Maggie, I'm so sick——"

"Oh, poor Mamma! Come, let me get you back to bed."

"My stomach aches so—and my legs——" She lay in her bed, her knees drawn up, whimpering a little, her blue beseeching eyes darkening with pain as pools darken in a storm.

Maggie waited in the kitchen for the water to heat. The loud hurrying tick of the clock, the slow drip of the water-tap, the dark high ceiling, high as the night, that the faint light of her lamp could not reach, made her feel weak with loneliness. She was frightened—something was waiting in the dark behind her. "Edward——!" she called across the miles.

Then a chill of terror crinkled over her as she heard Mamma scream.

Three days, three nights. That screaming, thin as a knife, that shaking, that hurling back and forth in the deep white bed. Nothing could counteract the poison of that dish Aunt Priscilla had offered her so lovingly. Dr. Chase couldn't help her, no one could help her, though every one came to ask, driving up with baskets of grapes and autumn flowers, and saying, "If there's *anything* we can do——!" Martha worked all day and most of the night, good as gold, feeling sad and excited and bursting with importance. On Sunday morning the congregation prayed for Margaret, stealing glances full of that strange excitement at the Campions' empty pew.

"O Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need; look down from heaven, we humbly beseech thee, behold, visit, and relieve thy sick servant——"

The peaceful grey walls with their moss-rosebuds and lace, the fresh, white curtains, the piled white clouds in the soft sky, looked at Mamma tranquilly. The stoppers of her perfume bottles threw splashes of rainbows over her white bed. And all this still rose and silver brightness, this sweet, accustomed peace, held in its heart the black whirlpool in which she was sinking.

Comfort came to her twice through her pain, not in the thought of Papa, not in prayer. Once May brought in a vase of fragrant, pink tea-roses blurred with a silvery bloom of dew, with delicate sprays of

dusk red leaves, and Mamma's tortured and bewildered eyes saw them and loved them. And once she whispered, "Maggie, if I—if anything should happen, promise you'll always take care of Victor."

"Oh, I will, I will!"

She smiled. For a moment she floated at peace, before the dark tumult sucked her in again.

She longed for Victor passionately, but she wouldn't let him come to her, for fear of frightening him.

"Can't I see Mamma, Maggie?"

"Not just yet, honey. Wait until she's better."

"Would she like Bundle?"

"Not just yet."

So he would go and hide in the wagon-shed, behind the sea-blue farm cart, out of hearing of that thin tortured screaming. And Bundle, all big paws and soft, clumsy heaviness and sad, anxious eyes, was companion and comforter and handkerchief.

Maggie passed through and beyond ordinary exhaustion. She saw everything, the tiniest things, the blue and silver star of beads on Papa's red cloth watch-pocket, Aunt Priscilla's small pear shaped tears that never stopped, the tufts of cotton in Martha's ears, the tiny green-white spider on the black grapes Cousin Sam brought, with a queer bright clearness. Everything had become brilliant, intense, and strange, like the reflections and colors in a soapbubble just before it breaks.

She sat by the window at the end of the third night,

watching the sky and the river turn the faint silver of a moth's wing. Just at dawn a light wind touched her cheek, gentle and comforting. The sky kindled to a sheet of living rose, and the river was a golden river of life, flowing into her heart, flowing out from her heart as she watched, sitting there quietly, not knowing that Mamma was dead.

Chapter Sixteen

EDWARD was coming. Maggie had never been so brisk and cross. How she ordered them about! And she was everywhere—whipping cream for the charlotte russe, shouting to Albert to bring in more firewood, carrying pots of pinks and ivy from the conservatory into the parlour.

"*Lily!* Don't put that wet pot on the table—*mercy!* Now look at that!"

And she would fly for a cloth, with Bundle jumping around her, tumbling over his paws, wanting to play.

"Oh, Bundle, look-*kout!* Victor, for *pity's-sake* put your dog somewhere where he won't be under foot every second!"

"Oh, Maggie, please don't be so cross and bossy!"

And then, giving the tumblers an extra polishing, she struck one so that it chimed and rang, faint, faint, a thread of exquisite sound, humming, like a bell deep under the sea.

And she was lost, listening to it, not hearing it, gazing with bright soft eyes through Mamma's oil painting of lady-fingers and strawberries and a tea-pot, through the terra-cotta wall behind it, through the falling snow, through the sky. And there seemed to be a bloom on her, a radiance.

There were ferns of frost on the kitchen windows; the pump, to keep it from freezing, was wearing Mamma's old red cloth opera cape with the cock feather collar, its handle sticking out like a sword. Nothing was quite its ordinary self, magic had touched The Maples.

It was almost time to start for the station when she came in tears to May.

"I can't go to meet Edward."

"Why not?"

"I look so hideous!"

"I have seen you look better," said May candidly. "What have you been doing to your hair?"

"I tried to crimp it."

"Well, never mind, I guess it'll come out as you drive up. Take my frill—that collar's so stiff and horrid, and you can have my muff too, only *please* don't get it all wet in the snow, and remember to hold the good side out and the rubbed side against you. Maggie—black makes you look so washed-out—I don't suppose you'd take a red ribbon—I just happen to have some if you would—and wet it with cologne and rub it on your cheeks?"

"*May!*"

"Well, I've heard of girls doing it," said May, blushing deeply.

"Only bad women paint their faces," Maggie told her severely.

What if she had imagined everything? What if he

didn't come? What if there wasn't any Edward? She was so afraid of that sometimes that it was agony, when he wasn't there and no one was speaking of him. How to be sure, to be sure it was all real? And when she felt that way she couldn't say "Edward," because only suppose their faces had said, "Edward? Who's that? We don't know anyone named Edward."

She would watch for Uncle Willie's horse and carriage, bringing the mail, bringing a letter from him. From her window she could see the carriage far up the road, looking so different, somehow, from the way it looked when it was only going to church or market; and she would pretend to herself she hadn't seen it, going on trying to do whatever she was doing, weak in the knees—dizzy—until someone called from downstairs:

"*Mag*-gie! *Let*-ter!"

She never got used to his letters. She would cry over them, kiss them—practical Maggie!—carry them crackling under her chemise, wake up in the night to feel them beneath her pillow, or light her candle to make sure that he had really written what she hardly dared believe she remembered. And no matter how often she re-read them, the words were a shock of bliss, a flame of ecstasy.

"What's the news from the Far West?" Mamma would ask. She and Lily nearly burst with curiosity over each letter.

"Why—I don't think there is any, Mamma."

No news in that fat letter! Well, really!

"Mamma doesn't want you to tell her anything you'd rather keep to yourself, Maggie," she said, hurt, and was more hurt when Maggie didn't. But she never gave up.

"How is Edward—or ain't I allowed to ask that?"

"What? Oh—oh, yes, thank you, Mamma," Maggie answered vaguely, gently, looking at Mamma with dazzled eyes that did not see her.

But now it wasn't a letter that was coming, it was Edward. And how could she make herself feel it? She was numb, she couldn't even remember what he looked like. And probably he had forgotten what she looked like, too. How would they ever recognize each other? They should have arranged something—"I will carry a sealskin muff and you wear a red carnation."

"Edward will be here any minute now!" She tried to wrench herself out of this numbness and feel the passion, the bliss that his coming should bring her, but she only felt as if she were going to be sick.

He couldn't kiss her *really*, with everyone at the station taking such an interest. And in the carriage her hat got in the way, and besides they were both thinking of Albert's back and Albert's ears.

She forced warmth and brightness into her voice, winking to keep the tears back.

"What kind of a trip did you have?"

And he answered with the same false brightness:

"Oh, all right. You're looking wonderful. How are the others?"

"All right. Victor has long trousers now, just for best. He can't wait to show you! The girls took their sewing to Fannie Leaf's, but they'll be back for tea."

"I thought May didn't waste much love on pretty Fannie?"

"Oh, she goes over there a lot now—she and Robert are having an affair."

"That's different! How about Ralph Wither?"

"He's engaged to a Dover girl. Look, it's snowing harder than ever! I was afraid it might make your train dreadfully late."

"We were about ten minutes late, weren't we?"

"About that, I think."

(*Oh, where are you, where are you?*)

"Well, here we are!" The pine branches swept down, dark and sad through the falling snow, the fields were white, and in the fountain in front of the house each iron calla lily was heaped with snow. The two strangers got out of the carriage and went into the house.

"This room is always cold in a storm—I am cold."

"Maggie, can't we go up to the school-room?"

And they were alone, really alone, in the room they had always loved best. She lighted the logs in the black marble fireplace and the room was fragrant with burning pine-wood and the geraniums, too spindly for

downstairs, that looked out at the falling snow. There were the shabby books, the wobbly table with "A Lily Among Thorns," propping up one leg, Mamma's sewing-machine, the dressmaking dummy with her wire legs and tiny black pear-shaped head and high proud bust, wearing a white flannel dressing sacque with violet bows that May was making. The goldfish that lived in the garden pool in summer, swam in a wash-tub, in and out of their castle of stones, in and out of the waving water plants, gleaming sides of red and gold and silver, filmy floating tails. Miss Proctor's poems, decorated with tear blisters and gingerbread crumbs, lay open on the window-seat, left by Lily.

They kissed each other with love and tenderness, clinging close, but the longed-for moment had gone—had never been. Her hat, the men at the station, all the cloud that surrounds us, had kept them apart. And they had wanted it so that now they were too tired.

"Remember, Maggie?" And as he began to play chopsticks on the old piano, the shell of thin ice around her heart melted so that she was warm and alive and happy again, and able to make a terrific face at him.

"Maggie—I have the most tremendous news!" He beat her palms lightly together as he talked, stopping now and then to kiss them. Happiness bubbled in every word, and she had never seen his eyes shine so.

"We can be married! We can be married right away! The company's sending me to South America in a month—it's a wonderful chance—it means every-

thing, absolutely everything! It's too good to be true! It won't be easy—not many girls could do it; but you can, Maggie, darling, darling! You won't be afraid!"

She flamed to his words, answering him silently, burningly.

"I talked to a man who'd been out there—I especially asked him if there were flowers, I thought you'd like to know; and he says there are. He says there are orchids growing right on the trees in sort of bunches, pale purple and greeny white, and they hold so much rain that the snakes climb along the branches and drink out of them—maybe he was fooling me, but anyway that's what he said. He said there were trees all covered with great big cream-colored flowers that smell fine—I don't remember the name, but I've got it written down somewhere for you. And you can get parrots for nothing, almost—of course, they talk Spanish, but we could teach them. And he said the babies were awfully cunning, it's so hot they don't wear a stitch, and they're all copper-colored. And, perhaps, he was exaggerating, but he said the ferns along the river were as big as trees——'

The firelit walls faded, the falling snow, the ice-filled river. On another river they floated, locked in each other's arms, floating on water like black satin under the great green lace umbrellas of the ferns, lit from beneath by a million fireflies, lit from above by all the stars. A pad, pad of feet in the shadows, and green eyes looked out at them—the satin water parted

and flowed back from a swimming snake. Terror and beauty and passion.

The wind sighed, bringing back the snow, clicking it gently against the window.

"That other fellow hates to leave."

"Why does he?"

"Well, he wants to be with his family. He has a twelve-year-old boy, and it's bad for children there, fevers, and no schools."

The shell of ice closed about her heart again.

"But then—Victor? What about Victor?"

"Well, *what* about Victor?"

"I can't come if Victor can't come with us—I can't leave Victor, Edward."

"Don't be absurd!"

"But I thought that we—that he—I thought——"

"I'm sorry, but, of course, he can't come with us."

"Then you must go without me."

"Leave you for five years? Maggie, you're crazy! You can leave him here."

"Oh, Edward, you know May and Lily—I couldn't leave him with them. May doesn't think about a thing in the world but clothes and men, and Lily's such a goose. Why, they can't even take care of themselves, let alone Victor."

"Well, leave him with someone else, some of your relations."

"How could I leave him with Aunt Priscilla? He's never been strong, and you know the way they live,

meals any time or no meals, just a piece of moldy cake, and *dirt*——! Edward, how can you ask me to leave him with her, when it was her carelessness killed Mamma?"

"I know, darling, I do understand that. But they aren't the only ones. Let him stay with the Blows."

"I couldn't. Cousin Lizzie doesn't like him. She doesn't like any of us. She was in love with Papa, and I think it made her hate Mamma and all of us, really. And she's so queer—I almost think she's crazy. And Cousin Sam drinks dreadfully, and they hate each other. It's terrible there, it frightens me. And Victor's so sensitive, he's always had such love and gentleness, it would kill him."

"You've all of you always spoiled him, that's the real trouble."

"We have not! And if we have, is that *his* fault?"

"Anyway, taking him with us is out of the question."

"I can't leave him! I promised Mamma!"

"She had no right to let you."

"She had! And anyway I couldn't leave him."

("Where are you? I can't find you! *Oh, where are you?*" And the other was crying, "Come back to to me! I am lost! Come back!" But so far apart, they could no longer hear each other. They could hear nothing but anger, feel nothing but anger that filled the room so that the crimson curtains, the red geraniums, the fire-colored fish, the fire itself, seemed part of its blazing.)

"He's always come between us—always. Even the last night before I went west he was down after us, calling you away. I'd give up my work—it isn't that—but you're the only person in the world that matters to me, and I must be first to you or I won't be anything. I won't take just what you can spare me from Victor. If you love me, you'll come."

"He needs me."

"I need you."

"Not as much as he does—no one needs me as much as he does."

"It's Victor or me, Maggie."

The baby lay in the big wash-basket under the wistaria vine wailing until she came to comfort him, the child ran to her from imagined terrors, the boy lifted his wet face and swollen eyes to her as she came out of the room where Mamma was dying. They held out their hands to her as the Child had held out his hands on the day of scillas and snow.

"It's Victor, Edward."

Carefully, as if she were made of thinnest glass, she moved about the room. Nothing of Edward must be left, now that Edward himself was gone. The dent he had made in the sofa cushion, the hearth-rug corner that his foot turned up. Carefully, so as not to break

her fragile glass fingers, she tidied them. Then she sat in the window-seat, her eyes on the falling snow, her hands lying lightly in her lap.

She was empty, empty as the shell of a locust that still clings to a tree trunk; legs, eyes, body all there, but the bright soaring wings that were in it, the life that was in it, torn out and away.

And suddenly she ran after him, tore after him, tumbling down the stairs, leaving the hall door wide for the wind and the snow to enter, stepping on her skirt, stumbling, running through the snow in her thin slippers. He had gone to the Allens'—she would go to him, they would be together again, forever and ever. "Edward, Edward, I'm coming—oh, Edward, I want you!"

Edward her lover and friend to whom she had given the bread of tears.

"Victor," sighed the wind among the pine branches. "Victor," sighed the sifting snow.

Victor frightened. Victor homesick. Victor needing her.

Across the fields she saw Victor trudging home through the dusk, his shoulders up, his head down against the snowy wind. Passionate, enfolding tenderness flooded her, and pain beyond any pain she had ever known. It was as if her heart had been broken open so that her brother could enter in completely. But Edward was there, too, would be there forever. No matter if she never saw him again, no matter what

happened. Could anything make her stop loving him? Can storms put out the stars?

She went back to the house, and in to the new life that still looked so much like the old. The horsehair sofa, the parlor fire smoking a little, Dicky and Downy piping in their cages, the smell of carnations and of frying chicken, the clock on the stairs, that sounded like water falling drop by drop——

She must go and take off Edward's place from the tea-table—she must go—as soon as she stopped shaking——

The door burst open, and Victor came stamping in, all red cheeks and snow.

"Hello, Maggie! Where's Edward?"

"He's gone."

"He's coming back to tea, isn't he?"

"No."

"Did you tell him we were going to have charlotte russe?"

And suddenly she cried in a high quivering voice:

"Victor Campion, I've told you one million times to scrape off your feet and not come tracking snow into the house!"

Victor looked up with mild reproach from where he sat struggling with his rubber boots.

"Well, don't take my head off, Maggie, it isn't *my* fault Edward couldn't stay."

Chapter Seventeen

THE ladies were stealing a good many glances at the clock beneath the Arab and his prancing steed on Mrs. Leaf's mantelpiece. Four o'clock—certainly time for coffee and cake if their suppers weren't to be spoiled. The flannel for the orphans' nightgowns puckered more and more slowly over their needles.

And then, instead of going comfortably in and sitting around the dining-room table for their cake and coffee as they always did, always, at every meeting of the Guild, Carpus the houseman in his white jacket, with his black forehead all puckered with perplexity, brought in a tray and put it on a small spidery table by Mrs. Leaf—and there wasn't anything on it but tea and bread and butter! Tea! And bread and butter! Mrs. Talbot nearly cried, she was so disappointed, and Mrs. Pennock gave Mrs. Holly such a look! It was hardly worth the trouble of balancing the cups and plates. And poor Miss Perry, who had counted on saving her supper, gazed round at the blue velvet ottomans and chairs with their fat fringes, the grand gas chandelier like a floating bouquet of white glass tulips with twisty stems, and the bright-colored peasants dancing on large china vases, and couldn't

understand it at all. Mrs. Leaf generally gave "such an elegant entertainment."

Mrs. Leaf knew what they were feeling, and was bright pink with self-consciousness. But her guest from New York, Mrs. Hawthorn, had afternoon tea, with bread and butter, so the Leafs were having it—and the ladies of the Guild were having it.

Mrs. Hawthorn's opulent curves, covered with tight black silk, filled an *S* shaped rocking-chair, white frothed from beneath her long black train, bracelets encircled her plump white wrists and a chatelaine-watch clung to the steeps of her bosom. She was being charming to everyone, as a rose sheds its fragrance for all, as a queen bows to the crowd. Mrs. Almond thought she certainly washed her hair with soda to make it golden, and told Hessie Farley so; and Hessie murmured back that *that* was probably what gave her face that queer artificial look, and that very likely it wasn't enamelled at all.

"Fannie and Prentice and their two little girls are home for a visit, May," said Mrs. Leaf. "Fannie's so anxious to see you. She told me to tell you you must be sure to come for lawn-tennis, tomorrow morning, all three of you."

"We couldn't, thank you, Mrs. Leaf. Victor gets home from Harvard this evening, and we simply couldn't leave him."

"But, of course he must come too! Little Victor Campion a grown-up Harvard gentleman—think of

it! How time flies! You know you all seem children to me, and yet here's Fannie been married four years —by the way, is she a month older than you, or a month younger? We were trying to remember. *Older!* That's what I told them. And Robert married a year and a half, and both the children thinking they know more about bringing up babies than I do! No soothing syrup, if you please! And their stuck-up nurse-girls! But I must say the babies are lovely—remind me to show you a new photograph of Isabel holding little Robbie—he certainly looks like his daddy. Now you come tomorrow, or Fannie will feel dreadfully. I told her and Lucy Hawthorn they were bad girls not to stay for the sewing this afternoon, but they all went over to the Sandersons to play at lawn-tennis—they're nuts on it, as Robert says. Carpus! Now put the tray here—here on the table, and take the teapot out—excuse me, May—and tell Lissa to fill it up again. Carpus! Tell Lissa not so strong—not so strong—no, don't take the tray, just the *teapot*—Mercy!"

"I'm afraid my little Goosey-Lucy isn't much of a loss as far as the sewing goes," said Mrs. Hawthorn, throwing a veil of tact over her friend's fluster. "She belongs to a sewing circle in New York, but I don't believe the girls do much but gossip and drink chocolate. I notice most of the sewing's brought home for my poor Elise to do."

"Elise is Mrs. Hawthorn's French maid," Mrs. Leaf

explained. That made up for Carpus acting as if he'd never seen a teapot in his life before—the foolish!

"Mrs. Hawthorn was lovely, wasn't she?" asked Lily as the sisters walked home. "Did you see her handkerchief? It was all lace except for a piece of cambric about the size of a postage stamp, and she smelled so sweet, like that soap from Paris Cousin Lizzie gave you one Christmas, sort of heliotropy."

May's face flushed darkly, and her lip began to tremble.

"I couldn't bear her! You could see every minute she was thinking, 'I'm being charming! I'm being perfectly charming to all these country bumpkins!' Yes, and that's what we are—country bumpkins, and I'm *sick* of it! Aren't we ever going to do anything all our lives but sit at home and scrimp, scrimp, scrimp, so that *Victor* can have nice clothes, *Victor* can get away, *Victor* can go to college? We're human, too, aren't we?"

"Why, *May*——!"

"Yes, 'why, *May!*' I'm sick and tired of wearing a steamed velvet iron-holder trimmed with an old duck wing Maggie's cured on the wagon-shed wall, because I can't afford a hat, and so Victor *can*. Who'd look at me, who'd look at any of us in these old made-overs? Who is there *to* look, anyway? There isn't a man here who isn't married or about a hundred—but Victor must have everything, so we'll just sit at home and twiddle our thumbs and get older and older and older,

and fifty years from now they'll still be calling us the Campion girls——"

She began to laugh. "Did you hear Mrs. Leaf bragging to me about Fannie and Robert and their children? Why should *I* be expected to be interested in Robert Leaf's baby, I should like to know? He and Isabel can have a million babies for all I care—it certainly isn't of the slightest importance to me——"

"Why, May!"

"Why, Lily! I wish you could see your face!" May laughed, harder, harder, until she was almost sobbing. And then suddenly the jangle of laughter stopped, and she looked faint and exhausted, opening her hand and letting the hot crushed daisies she had snatched off by their heads fall to the ground.

They had scraped to send Victor to Harvard. May complained, but she made their clothes just the same, turning and making over and trimming with bits of this and that from the piece bag in the entry closet, until they looked pretty enough really to have come from the grand places whose labels she ripped out of Mamma's old gowns and sewed in. And she trimmed their hats, too, taking one by one the stuffed birds, the oriole, the bluejay, the rose-breasted grosbeak, from their branches under the glass bell on top of Papa's secretary.

Maggie did the cooking. Martha had married her young darkie, and a life he was leading her! And

Lily helped save by giving up her music lessons with Miss Martin, and working alone, with a novel propped open on the music rack while she practiced her scales, to relieve the monotony.

Maggie had set her heart on Victor's going to Harvard because Papa had gone there. And Victor wanted to go, too, while the going was still far away, while the mountains were distant waves of mist-blue, instead of steep grey rocks and slipping stones. At home, planning to go, he had been all of Harvard; but when he got to Harvard he was nothing.

Those first homesick days! He would have run home to The Maples if he could, as he had run on his first day of school.

He sat in his small room looking as lost as if he were alone on a raft in the middle of the sea. From his window he saw a thin grey cat slowly stalk a sparrow; then a man came by calling bananas. The sparrow flew away, the cat poured itself through a hole in a fence, the banana man's cries grew fainter and were still.

At dusk he went out and bought a box of crackers. He could see that the other young men on the streets were all accustomed to the place, that everyone knew everyone else intimately. They knew just where they were going and why, as they walked along, calm and assured. He felt as if they were all looking at him, and laughing. And although he thought he was lost in the strange streets, he *couldn't* ask the way. "Could

you please tell me——" No, he couldn't make a sound——

And in sudden terror of having really been stricken dumb, he dashed into a drug store, that seemed so friendly with its familiar smell, its bright blue boxes of the very same toothpowder that they used at The Maples, the "Pear's Soap Boy" getting his scrubbing from his grandmother, that he could ask quite naturally for a box of shoe polish.

He came out of the drug store, drooping his eyelids and curving his mouth scornfully, then catching sight of a clock on a building, pulled out Papa's big watch, compared the two, and suddenly hurried off with a slight, anxious frown, as if he were late for an important engagement. Lamps were being lit in the houses —he could see books, geraniums, maids pulling curtains together. Lamps were being lit for these other people, lamps were being lit at home——

Oh, the breathless relief of getting off the street into his own room! He shut the door and leaned against it, his heart pounding as if there were pursuers on the stairs.

He ate the crackers, pausing for a long time between bites, his wide blue eyes fixed absently on the smoky red wall. He and the girls were coming home from a walk in the autumn dusk—a rabbit's white tail went flashing under a hedge. The boats on the river hooted and moaned to each other through the fog, and the yellow leaves under the tulip tree were

too wet to rustle. May's chilly pink fingers lit the first fire, the thin blue and yellow flames came licking through the dry sticks and around the logs that had waited there for them ever since last April, beetles that had set up housekeeping came bursting out, the smoke poured up in one thick, greyish yellow curl. They had supper in front of the fire, cold beef and hot baked potatoes, and big, pale yellow-green grapes——

He was getting into bed in his room at home. Everything was just as it had always been, except the new suit waiting to be put on tomorrow, the bag still open, waiting for his brush and comb and toothbrush, and the two oblongs of dark olive-green leaves and vermilion berries on the wall paper that everywhere else had faded to shades of straw color. Mamma had hung there in her sealskin sacque, caught in a photographer's snowstorm, and Papa, with his hand thrust into the front of his coat, but now they were packed to go to Cambridge with him.

There was a tapping at the door, and Maggie's voice, low, so as not to wake the others.

"Victor—I saw your light. Are you all right? Can I help do anything?"

And he answered, pretending to yawn, so that she shouldn't guess that he was wide awake with nervousness and excitement:

"Aw righ', thank you—g'nigh'——"

Well, here he was. He finished his crackers. And then he blackened his shoes, slowly, thoroughly. When

they were polished, that was all there was to it. He had nowhere to go in them.

But after awhile he made some friends, and they had good times together.

At the Holly Tree Inn, around the oil-cloth covered table that red-haired John in his red shirt was wiping up with a cloth as black as a crow:

"Now I'll tell you what it is about this fellow Zola——"

"The girl I'd like to see is Lily Langtry. Very snappy, my boy, very snappy!"

"Happy thought! What about an oyster supper and a few bottles of the rosy, one of these frosty evenings, beloved brethren?"

And John's grubby hand setting down the wonderful poached eggs and hot, thin, buttered toast.

Strolling together to the place on the corner of Holyoke Street, with its cigars, its soda-fountain with the slender marble pillars on either side of the mirror, its jewelled lamp that might have lighted some harem.

"Afternoon, gentlemen."

White walrus-mustache, eyeglasses on a bit of pink string, and straw hat that seemed as much a part of him as the fungus is part of the tree, he stood there in shirt-sleeves and velveteen waistcoat, mixing soft drinks.

"What's yours, Mr. Campion?"

To have such friends! To be called by name! "Ham sandwich and chocolate ice-cream soda,

General!" And in his heart he was jumping up and down like an excited little boy.

A night in Boston, starting with "musties" at Billy Park's, and going on—where? Among the clouds, among the comets? All men were brave, all women beautiful.

"Ha-a-appy *thought!* Nozher bottle of oh be joyful!"

"Fixshed bayonet for me, Zhorzh."

"Branny—shhh-*mash!*"

And coming home in the horse car, how sweetly they sang:

"'When I drive out eash day in my little coo-pay hay—'
hold—it——
'I tell you I'm shomehing to shee——'"

They sang so sweetly that Victor could not keep back his tears. Their voices died, his sobs died. He and his friends slept upon each other's shoulders until at the Yard entrance the kind conductor called, "Good morning, gents! Sports' Alley!"

Then they saw each other home, back and forth, back and forth, for hours. And finally, in his own room, Victor remembered the carnation in his buttonhole. Someone had put it there—who in the dickens? Someone he'd promised never to forget. He put it in his hat in the middle of the floor and poured in all the water from his pitcher. Now and then he would lose himself in dreamy admiration of anything his eyes

happened to fall on—his lamp, his soapdish—but presently he would wrench himself back, and pour in a little more water, until it was all used and, something accomplished, something done, he could go to bed in his boots.

But lessons—examinations——

He had tried—but before he understood the beginnings of things, the class was leaping on, and he was trying to leap with it, trying to read before he knew his letters. Clutching his hair in his hands, he would scowl at his books under his green shaded student-lamp, despairing, yawning, taking a great bite of apple, and wishing for some open-sesame that would magically unlock the door of knowledge for him.

He hadn't passed his examinations. He had been warned after the mid-years, and now he had to tell the girls that he wasn't going back. The train lurched towards home from familiar station to familiar station. The car lamps swung and creaked.

"Well, girls, brace yourselves for a shock—yours truly is home for good."

The blue river with its white sails unrolled alongside the tracks, the daisies ran down to them.

"I have to tell you something. I couldn't pass the exams., and the pleasure of my company is not requested for next year."

The church spire over the trees, the Leaf's high hedge, Mrs. Pennock's cows a brown fleet in the foam of daisies. But the feeling of home withheld itself,

he couldn't feel anything but that gnawing sickness at the pit of his stomach.

"Girls, I am sorry to have to tell you——"

And in the middle of Maggie's account of the ridiculous time Aunt Priscilla was having with her guinea-chickens, he burst out, sounding loud and rough because he had been planning it so long:

"I can't go back next year! I couldn't pass my examinations!"

He had told! He had told, and they didn't scorn him. Maggie said she'd always heard, *always*, that examinations didn't signify anything, *really;* and, of *course*, he couldn't go back and be a freshman all over again. Lily cried, "Those *mean* professors," and wept a little; and May said everybody knew that what you went to college for was the friends you made, not the things you learned out of books. Waves of love broke over him, waves of gratitude, and he would have died for his sisters happily.

And at last the blinding, numbing tension was dissolved, and he could let the feeling of home flow through him, the sweet air, the lights moving silently on the river, the shadowy parlor and the absurd things that had been there forever, no one knew why, no one knew from where—the lacquer bowl with its strange sweet smell, the three-cornered bronze ink-well that never held any ink in its little glass hat, the penwiper of a doll's head dressed as a nun on which no pens were

wiped. Drunk with relief he plunged after Maggie, helping her shut the windows for the night, and doing such things to the curtains! It nearly drove her crazy, and yet she couldn't say anything, it was so sweet of him to try to help.

Chapter Eighteen

HAPPINESS to wake at dawn and lie listening to the birds, to bathe in the crackling copper-lined tub, and go leaping down through the soaking grass to get a brown and yellow pansy all beaded with dew for his buttonhole; to eat strawberries and mud, and presently at breakfast, with the girls beaming on him, more strawberries, and coffee with thick, yellow cream instead of chalk and water and bluing ("*Really* chalk and water and bluing?" Lily wanted to know) brown eggs Albert had brought in an hour ago, corn bread, and ham still sputtering and sizzling in the dish. Home again!

And that morning he met Lucy Hawthorn.

They all went to the Leafs, even Maggie, who said she was too old for such gadding and had a hundred things she had to do at home, anyway. But Victor wanted her to come.

The dark cedar trees half hid the blue stone house with its low bay-windows, and swept the shaven lawn that unrolled to the stone breakwater against which the river was clucking and slapping now, and from which at low tide the river mud spread like wet chocolate icing. The air above the round beds of heliotrope quivered with fragrance.

"Well, Victor! How does it seem to be home?"

"Hello, Victor! How did you leave Fair Harvard?"

"Mrs. Hawthorn, Mr. Campion."

Mrs. Hawthorn, sitting in the lovely, liquid shadow of her lilac parasol, gave him her famous smile, while she took in every detail through the little black lace veil that came just to the tip of her nose.

Prentice Page with ferns inside his hat to keep off the sun, looking like a faun from the forest, played with May against pretty Fannie and Maggie in her manly straw sailor, and Lily good-naturedly trotted after the balls, protesting, "Oh, I like to, really, *truly* I do, I'd *loads* rather!"

The ball bounced gently from tiny racquet to tiny racquet across the casual sagging of the low net. The girls in their eelskin dresses and long ruffled skirts held on their hats as they played, but Lucy, sitting on the grass with Victor, had taken hers off, and the sun gleamed on the pale brown silk sweep of her hair from the cloud of soft frizz on her forehead to the low knot of braids like shining brown nuts. She was all pink and cream, her little ears, her tender little nose, the delicate soft curve of her chin, candid and young. The rose, fringed about with other sweetnesses, heliotrope, pinks, and rose geranium leaves, is the heart of the nosegay; and in the lovely surrounding of sunny fragrant air, kind happy voices, being home again, the relief of having told, Lucy was the rose.

"What funny little gold pigs on your bracelet!"

"They're *porte-bonheurs*. Aren't they sweet? I love my piggie-wiggies!"

"Lucky pigs! Oh, look! Three brown butterflies have settled on your skirt!"

"*Where?* Oh, you mean those bows! But real *flowers* are the most fashionable trimming now, so why not real butterflies?"

"Happy thought! How about real fruit and vegetables? A ball gown with a spinach what-do-you-call-em gored on the bias with tomatoes, and a cabbage for a bouquet!"

"Oh, Mr. Campion, don't! You're giving me a stitch in my side! But you mustn't call my butterfly bows brown—that color's 'Bottled Cloves,' if you please, Sir!"

"Live and learn! What color is this lovely dress?"

"This old rag? What color would you say?"

"Sky-blue pink!"

"Go to the foot of the class! It's 'Marguerite Blue,' and Fannie's blue is called 'Heavy Eyes.' "

"They sound like drinks—'Lady's Smiles' and 'Morning-Glories.' "

"I'm afraid everything sounds like a drink to you fast Harvard men—I suppose you're all *dreadfully* wild. I'm frightened to death of you."

"Oh, say not so," said Victor, looking as wild as he could.

"Did you graduate this year, Mr. Campion?"

"Well, no——"

"Oh, you're going back!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I don't think I *will* go back next year. The fact is, I feel as if I ought to stay here and take care of my sisters and look after the estate, you know."

"Oh, I do think that's wonderful!" said Lucy's soft voice, and Lucy's forget-me-not eyes said, "How noble you are! How noble!"

Prentice and May were cooling off in the shade, while Victor and Lucy took their places.

"More beauteous than ever, May—whose heart are you breaking now?"

"Oh, I've settled down to being an old maid, Prentice. I've decided I'd rather paddle my own canoe."

"Tell that to the marines! Those eyes will never let you."

She crossed her slender ankles, pulling up her skirt a little, and touched his face with the spray of heliotrope she had been holding to her lips.

"The slave brushes the flies away from the face of the Sultan," she murmured.

"Look at that girl, Bessie!" Mrs. Hawthorn said to Mrs. Leaf. "Look at the amount of ankle she's showing—and making such eyes at Prentice. You can see he's laughing at her."

"Robert was very much taken with her several years ago—I thought something might come of it, but then he lost interest, for some reason—that seems to

be the way with May Campion and her young men, and I'm sure I don't know why."

"Don't you, my dear? I do. She's so distressingly eager."

"But she's very pretty and animated."

"Much too animated. I'm sure she's been told it suits her, so she's always on the sparkle, no matter what one's saying. I find her exhausting. And *can* that color be natural? I think it was a lucky escape for Robert."

"Well, *I* was relieved, I must say. She gets so excited, and sort of wild looking sometimes, and there *is* a queer streak in the family—her cousin Mrs. Blow, went raving crazy a couple of years ago, and died from running out into a blizzard with nothing on but her nightgown; and you know anything like that makes one so nervous."

Carpus came over the lawn with a clucking pitcher of lemonade, and they sat together on the grass, drinking and talking.

"Let me read your palm, Prentice—oh, what a trail of broken hearts I see!"

"What do you think? My cruel husband wouldn't take me to see Bernhardt in *'La Dame aux Camelias'!* He said he was afraid my French wasn't bad enough!"

"Are you fond of the light fantastic, Miss Hawthorn?"

"A little more lemonade, *if* you please—whoa, Emma!"

"Oh, my dear! Don't mention jersey dresses! The times I've had getting out of mine!"

"Gracious, Maggie, how strong minded you sound! Don't tell us you're one of the Shrieking Sisterhood!"

Long trailing golden wings of sunlit air quivered over them—over them all—over Lucy.

And Victor, drunken with happiness, showing off to her, pretended his tennis racquet was a banjo, and strummed on it, singing:

> " 'Ping Wing, the Pieman's son,
> Was the very worst boy in all Canton;
> He ate his mother's pickled mice,' "

(Screams from the ladies!)

> " 'And threw the cat on the boiling rice,
> And when he'd eaten her, said he:
> "Me wonders where the mew-cat be!" ' "

For the first time in his life he really saw his home, because Lucy was going to see it. He nearly drove his sisters crazy.

"Maggie! Maggie! One of the calla lilies on the fountain is broken!"

"Oh, *Victor!* That was broken off before you were born."

"Well, did you know that the second pine tree on the drive is nearly dead?"

It seemed to him that the whole house, the whole place, was falling to pieces, that as he looked cracks

and blotches appeared on walls lightly held together by cobwebs.

Fat Lily, scarlet and streaming, hurled herself up the terraces with the lawnmower, Maggie laundered the muslin curtains and rewashed the best china with its light red seaweed pattern, May cut owls and bats and crescent moons out of dark brown paper and made a new dado of them for the parlor. And Victor, drunk with nervousness, bumped into them all, ran upstairs, forgot what he had come for, ran down again, and wished he had never been born.

The day was like an accordion. First it stretched out for ever so long, and then—swish!—it was folded up to almost nothing. If he didn't hurry, he wouldn't be dressed by the time they came! Even if he did hurry, it was too late now. And he tried to decide whether to wear his blue tie that really was the color of his eyes, or the raspberry-red one that stood for a passionate nature and Harvard. With shaking fingers he tied the blue, took it off, tried the red, half untied it, tied it again, looked at himself severely in the glass, took it off in a frantic hurry. He couldn't decide, he simply couldn't! In a panic he saw himself changing his tie all night—all his life—forever and ever, red, blue, red, blue, red, blue——

"*May!*"

"*What?*"

"Shall I wear my blue tie or my red?"

"Good gracious, I don't care—blue!"

Oh, what a relief!

"*Victor!*"

"*Hello!*"

"Hurry yup!"

"All right!" And he sat down on the edge of his bed, his clasped hands squeezed between his knees, and lapsed into a dream of Lucy.

"Goodnight—we've had a lovely time! Goodnight!"

"Goodnight! Goodnight!"

"I'll push the shutters to, May, if you'll bolt them."

"Do you know, Fannie's getting fat! But her dress was real pretty, wasn't it? I loved those bands of terra-cotta ribbon embroidered with trails of jasmine. I could fix over my pale green Cashmere that way."

"Lossie waited pretty well for just coming in, don't you think? And ain't it heavenly to think of the dishes all washed!"

"It seemed to me you had to do an awful lot of whispering," May said discouragingly. "And my goodness, Lily, I was never so mortified in my life as I was at the way you kept smiling at her!"

But Lily hadn't been able to help it, for she had remembered the way Lossie used to play "Company to Dinner" with them when they were children, in the tender green light under the beech tree, and she had

almost expected to find slices of peony petal ham and maple seed fried potatoes on the plates that Lossie's black hand set before them, and mud-and-water coffee in the cups.

"Well, I thought she did pretty well," Maggie repeated. "But I oughtn't to have trusted her to make the coffee—how *could* she have gotten it that way? It was just like mud and water."

"Was there any ice-cream left? Doesn't anybody want some?"

"Lily! Don't yawn that way—you'll dislocate your jaw! *Goodnight, Victor!* Aren't you going to say goodnight?"

Victor, floating up the stairs, came out of his trance with a start.

"Oh—goodnight!"

"*Can* you see why he's so moony about Lucy? Really, it's a good thing she's going home soon. She's a right nice little thing, but she hasn't enough sense to say boo to a goose."

The clouds washed over the moon like thin waves, the whole sky was flowing. In the few clear patches the stars were pale in the flood of silver light. Feathery dark clouds, clouds thin as gauze, streaming over the moon.

Maggie looked out at the night, yawning, thinking how early she would have to get up to look after her

newly hatched chickens. And as she looked, another moon rose in her heart, a great bubble of apricot pink floated up from the river, and she and Edward watched it, speaking to each other without words.

May looked out at the night before she lay down beside Lily, placidly sleeping with her fringe in a row of cocoons on her forehead. Oh, the moon made you feel queer! Why had she acted like such a cheap fool in the garden after supper? Oh, *why* had she let Prentice say those things, flattering and insolent? She knew she had been crazy to think he meant them when she saw him in the lamp-light again, saying good-bye in the hall, with Fannie's pretty ringed hand dangling through his arm. Perhaps, lying in bed before they went to sleep, he would tell her about it, laughing a little, and Fannie would laugh, too, pityingly, and say, "Poor old May!"

Oh! She crushed her cold hands against her blazing face.

Victor leaned out his window looking up at the sky. Of course, he had thought he was in love, hundreds of times, but this was different.

Lucy! Lucy!

"You are a dove, Lucy, my Lucy. You are a little white lamb. You are everything that is gentle and pure——

"It's like praying to think of you, Lucy——

"Well, really, Lucy, I don't call myself an authority

—oh, no, no, you are too kind—but since you ask for my opinion——"

Suddenly he put his head down in his arms, loving her.

"It means waiting, darling."

And he could imagine her answering:

"I would wait for you forever."

"Lucy, I come to you stained and scarred——"

(Oh, those glasses of beer at Billy Park's! Oh, the last horse-car jingling out to Cambridge!)

"Oh, Lucy, I think you're so lovely!"

The clouds flowed over the moon, from the river he heard the wash of the tide coming in. Through all his being he felt the stir, the flow of the night, the clouds, the waves, the faintly breathing wind, the people all over the world who were awake, who were loving each other.

Chapter Nineteen

MAGGIE hung Victor's dress-suit on the clothes-line to get rid of the smell of camphor. He was going to New York to stay at the Fifth Avenue Hotel where Papa had stayed, and to go to Lucy Hawthorn's ball. There had been a glazed cream-colored invitation for the girls, too, that Lily kept lying carelessly on the hall table, where everyone could see it; but Maggie said, of course, they couldn't think of going.

May had thought of it. Just for a moment she saw herself at the ball, dancing, floating in the arms of a tall stranger with a fascinating ugly face——

Not being able to have a new dress wouldn't matter —she could fix up the *eau de Nil* corded silk with the coffee stain on the skirt that Aunt Priscilla had given them, and that had been too grand for anything they would be apt to go to. She was so slender she could take that front breadth right out. And she had seen just the trimming for it in Wilmington—bands of tiny shells. Rainbow-colored shells peeping from waves of faint water-green silk—a mermaid come from the foam.

"I have been looking for you all my life. Where have you been hidden away?"

"Where? Where?" the violins cried. "Where?" cried the plucked strings of the harp.

"*But now that I have found you*——"

But, of course, she knew that they couldn't afford it. They really couldn't afford it for Victor, but for him they would manage somehow.

Coming back from the clothes-line, Maggie stopped by the bed of lilies-of-the-valley by the porch, such a convenient place for cherry stones. How sweet, how sweet! She never could get by them, even when she had a hundred things to do in the house she must pause before their altar. Now there was Victor's grey suit to sponge and press for the trip, a cake to make, and lunch to get, but she knelt beside them, breathing their fragrance, loving them. She gathered a spray or two of great white bells, their stems squeaking as she pulled them, and a cool green leaf, to take into the kitchen with her. They had never been so beautiful.

Why shouldn't Victor take a big bunch of them to Lucy? She suggested it to him when he came strolling out to the kitchen where she was cracking eggs for an omelet.

"I'll pack them in a nice box with wet cotton, and you take them up just as soon as you get there—Victor, *don't* eat those raisins, you'll spoil your lunch. You'll see they haven't anything like these in New York."

"Oh, well, I guess they'll have plenty of flowers—I don't believe I'd bother—I mean, I guess they'll have enough," said Victor, dreadfully embarrassed.

"They won't have any like these, and it won't be a bit of trouble. I'll pack the box right in your bag," Maggie said, killing a currant on the table with great firmness under the impression that it was a fly; and she thought, "If he takes them in the afternoon, they'll know he's reached New York, and they'll certainly ask him to supper, even if it's just a pick-up meal because of the party."

Oh, she did want him to have a good time! Her heart still ached so for him, because he had not been able to go back to Harvard. She had suffered for him all winter—so hard on him hanging around the place. She would look at him standing in the window watching the falling snow, whistling and rocking back and forth from his toes to his heels, or yawning by the fire over "A Daughter of Heth," or "Just As I Am," and think that really he would be happier doing some sort of work. But Victor felt that it was important to wait until just the right position offered itself.

Maggie found a splendid box for the lilies-of-the-valley, but just because it said "1 pr. Corsets, extra heavy boning" Victor was ridiculous, even though she offered to paste a piece of plain paper over the shocking words. So they had to be put in another box, not nearly as good.

He would much rather have let them stay at the hotel, much much rather. But he thought of Maggie going out last night after she had finished the dishes—she wouldn't let May wash them because of her pretty

hands, or Lily, because she broke too many plates—gathering a great burst of them, carillons of silver bells, cool with evening, and bringing them in for him to see and smell, her face shining.

He meant just to leave them at the big brownstone house. He was astonished to hear himself asking the butler, "Is Miss Hawthorn in?"

"Is that the man about the extra chairs?"

Mrs. Hawthorn came into the hall, all sweeping violet silk and foaming lace—was she dressed for the ball already at five in the afternoon, or could it be only a tea-gown?

"Are you the man about the extra chairs?"

"Oh—I'm Victor Campion, Mrs. Hawthorn—I just—I wondered if Lucy——"

"Oh. Mr. Campion. Yes, I remember." She gave him a finger and said in a preoccupied voice, "I'm sorry, Lucy is lying down."

"Oh, that's all right! I just brought a few lilies-of-the-valley, they aren't anything really, but we thought——"

He followed her into the drawing-room, cleared of most of its furniture, and sat on the edge of a small gilt chair, not wanting to stay, but afraid she would be hurt if he went right away. He felt his face getting red. "It's warm today, isn't it?" he asked, laughing a little, nervously.

"Heavens, will the goose *never* go?" thought Mrs.

Hawthorn; and she let a moment pass before she answered:

"Very warm."

He had never seen such a grand parlor. The high sky-blue ceiling was painted with clouds and cupids, and from it hung gas globes like giants' egg-cups, with the profiles of Roman emperors clear on the ground glass. Long mirrors reflected over and over again the firescreen of terra-cotta silk embroidered with bull-rushes, the marble lady looking down at a butterfly perched on her shoulder, Mrs. Hawthorn's violet draperies, and his own best grey suit and flaming face.

Would it be all right to go now? He didn't know how late you could get supper at the hotel, and he felt as if he had been sitting there for hours. There was a clock on the mantelpiece, but it was so fancy, its hands were such delicate traceries of golden frost-work against a golden moon of background that he couldn't read it at all.

"Well, I think maybe I'd better——"

And somehow he was out of the house, on the street. What a relief!

"*Mercy!*" cried Mrs. Hawthorn, flapping her hands with exasperation, as she hurried into the dining-room for a last look at the table before the florist's men left. All white and palest green, lilies-of-the-valley, masses and masses of them.

Lucy, rosy with sleep, came trailing down, wrapped

in a dressing gown of pale blue silk trimmed with swansdown, like fluffy white clouds in a summer sky, and helped herself to a glacé pear from a dish on the table.

"Your rustic admirer has been here," said her mother. "That Campion young man. He left a box of something or other for you somewhere, and he hopes we'll understand why his sisters couldn't come. Lucy Hawthorn, those extra chairs aren't here *yet!*"

"Oh, Mother! To think of Victor's coming all the way here for my ball! Oh, *can't* we ask him to the dinner?"

Her flower-blue eyes filled with tears as she thought of his lonely dinner at the hotel, her hand went out for a piece of crystallized pineapple.

"No we can't—there really isn't room for him. I'm sorry, but good gracious! Who would have *dreamed* of the goose coming all that distance? Now, Lucy, don't cry, or you'll spoil your eyes, and don't eat any more candied fruit, or you'll spoil the looks of the table."

Should he dress before dinner, or after? He couldn't decide, and this time he couldn't call over the stairs and ask one of the girls. If he could only go down and look first, to see what other people did. Perhaps, if he got dressed up, he'd be too conspicuous.

And for one weak moment he thought, "I don't believe I want any dinner. They'll be sure to have refreshments at the Hawthorns'." But he did go down.

Everything on the menu in French! He knew what some of the words meant, and he could have pronounced them splendidly to the girls, but pronouncing them to the waiter who had been fairly sputtering French to another waiter was different.

"Er—how is this today?"

The man stopped humming a little song up above Victor's head, and asked meanly, ignoring his pointing finger:

"How is what, sir?"

How purposeful and efficient the other diners looked, how perfectly clear about everything. He finished his first course, moved his glass to hide a spot of gravy on the table cloth, and waited for his chocolate ice-cream.

He waited and waited. Other people who had come in after him finished their dinner and went. He wouldn't stand it! He frowned, drumming on the table, and looked at his watch. Well, he had a long, long time before he need leave the hotel, but still he wasn't going to sit there and be ignored. He tried to see his waiter among those who skated past with bowls of salad or tureens of soup, who set down the dishes with a flourish that was almost a caress.

He wouldn't stand it another minute! And he said

meekly to a waiter so young and inexperienced that he allowed his eye to be caught:

"Oh—would you mind telling my waiter I'm ready for my ice-cream now?"

And all of a sudden, for the first time, he really felt, he really believed that in two or three hours he was going to see Lucy. He could feel his heart thumping; he was dizzy, dreamy with happiness.

"Anything more, sir?"

"Oh-a—what?"

He must have eaten his ice-cream without ever noticing it, lost in thoughts of Lucy, for there was the saucer in front of him, with just a few pale brown streaks left in it.

He was almost on the Hawthorns' steps before he decided that he was too early. So he took a long walk; and, when he came back, music was pouring from the open windows, carriages were rolling up and away, and a small crowd was watching gentlemen in crush hats and ladies in swansdown *sortie des bals* skim over the scarlet carpet from carriage to door. He followed them in more haughtily than any king.

Out of the blur, among all the people to whom he gave his beaming smile and dazzled blue gaze, he saw only Lucy—Lucy with her silky hair and apple-blossom skin, wearing a blue satin gown hand-painted with daisies, with a tight little basque buttoned down the front and a great, long grown-up train pouring out from masses of puffs and drapings.

The pianist flung up his hands and scattered a shower of silver drops. Flute, harp, and violin awoke; and at last Victor and Lucy were dancing together.

One, two, three, and a *one*, two, three!

He wished it had been a waltz—there was something so brisk about a polka. And what a crowd! Bump! "Excuse me, Lucy!" Bump! "Excuse me!"

Flowers everywhere—roses, carnations, heliotrope. And masses and masses of lilies-of-the-valley—his were a drop in the sea, lost.

Bump!

"It's such a jam, let's go to the conservatory," Lucy suggested a little breathlessly. "Doesn't the fountain sound cool? Oh, Victor, thank you so much for the *beau*tiful flowers—see, I'm wearing a little bunch of them, they're so much bigger and sweeter than the ones that came from the florist's!"

Her hand poised above his flowers among the laces at her bosom, touched them lightly as a hovering white butterfly. The darling! The darling! His heart swelled with gratitude and love.

"Why, they aren't anything—really! I just thought——"

"Oh, dear, there's the music—I must fly!"

"Lucy—how soon can I have another dance?"

"Oh, Victor, I'm *terribly* sorry, but——"

"Oh, that's all right!" he assured her, too quickly, too eagerly.

"But I'll introduce you to some nice girls."

"Damn some nice girls!" he wanted to shout. But what he said was:

"That'll be fine."

"But didn't I meet you at dinner?" asked the first nice girl.

"At dinner?"

"Yes, here at Lucy's dinner tonight?"

"Oh—no! No, I couldn't get here to dinner," Victor assured her. "I was unavoidably detained."

Bump!

"Suppose we go to the conservatory—it's lots too crowded for dancing," said the nice girl. She stole a look at her new pink satin slippers—he had danced all over them! She pulled up her gloves, settled her bangles, and unfurled her fan with the swansdown edge.

"Doesn't the fountain sound cool, Mr.—eh——?"

He had never felt so forlorn and homesick in his life. The music rose and fell sadly—a waltz, this time. Stay with me, my love, my love! No, I cannot stay.

He squeezed his hands in their new white kid gloves between his knees. "The fountain sounds cool, doesn't it?" he asked.

Maggie had said, "Don't come home the day after the dance—stay two nights. As long as you're in

New York you might as well really see it. And if the Hawthorns ask you to spend a few days, just you do it!"

So no one was expecting him as he bumped up the porch steps with his bag the afternoon after the ball. The lilies-of-the-valley perfumed the air—he was almost surprised that they were still in bloom, it seemed so long since he left home yesterday morning. How strange to see the house when he was supposed to be miles and miles away, looking just as it would have looked if at this minute h had still been in New York. May's flower scissors and a litter of wet stems and leaves, Lily's old shade hat with its muslin bow, Maggie's muddy overshoes, and Maggie herself coming up from the chicken-yard.

"*Victor!*" And then the delight changed to lamenting. "Oh, I told the butcher not to stop today!"

At her cry May and Lily came bursting out of the house to welcome him, to ask him a hundred questions.

"Have they an elegant house?"

"Didn't they like the lilies-of-the-valley?"

"Did Lucy look nice? What did she wear?"

"Oh, white, I think, or blue—something, anyway."

"Well, I should *hope* so!"

"What was the entertainment? Just salad and ice-cream, or did you have lobster? Do tell us!"

And as he answered he became confident, self-possessed, a man of the world kindly amused at all this

feminine flutter. They saw him the center of the ball, the master of ceremonies, the strong oak for those three ivies, Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorn and Miss Hawthorn, to cling to. He almost saw himself so, through their eyes.

Chapter Twenty

TWICE Lucy came to visit the Leafs', and each time Victor loved her more. He thought of her all the summer, all the autumn, all the winter. Well, not quite all. Not when he was enjoying biscuits like little puffs of summer cloud, with the golden honey from the row of beehives along the grape-house, nor when he was wishing Maggie wouldn't have mutton hash so often. Not when he was scratching mosquito bites, or blowing on cold fingers to warm them, not when he was brushing his teeth, putting Rowland's Macassar Oil where his mustache should be but wasn't, or discovering on Market Street that his sock had a hole in its heel. Not when he and Pip Grant and Tommy Holly, heads together, were singing at the top of their lungs:

" 'Miss Judy O'Connor lived frinst me
And tinder lines to her I wrote,
If you dare say one hard word agin her
I'll—thread on the tail of your mush, mush, mush, toorily addy
Mush, mush, mush, toorily aye——' "

But as much as most of us do when we say with all our hearts to the beloved, "I think of you every minute."

And with the lilies-of-the-valley Lucy came again to the Leafs', but only to say goodbye before she went abroad, to make the Grand Tour.

Victor wrote to her.

May 15.

DEAR DEAREST LUCY:

I wanted to tell you something while you were here, but I couldn't. But now I can't hold in any longer. I love you. I love you so much. Darling, darling Lucy, do you think you can ever love me? I come to you stained and scarred—I'm not worthy of you, but no man could be that, for you are like an angel, so lovely and innocent and good, I want to cry when I think about you.

It means asking you to wait for me, Lucy. I haven't anything to offer you except all my love, but I have accepted a position in Wilmington with a real estate company—it is rather a small beginning, but it is my belief there is a big future in it, and I'll work so hard for you, Lucy! Perhaps, I ought to have written to Mr. Hawthorn first, but I couldn't until I knew whether you could care for me a little. How I will watch the mail for your answer! It nearly kills me when I think that soon the ocean will be between us, but I can stand anything if you send me word before you go that there is any hope for me.

Lucy—when I think how lovely you were to me

the night before you left here, I feel so happy and I do love you so! I will keep your precious little handkerchief forever, and ever, and ever. Do you remember the moonlight on the river, and the way the lilies-of-the-valley smelled? They are "lilies-of-the-valley" to other people, but they are always "Lucy's flowers" to me. I enclose a spray to remind you of me when you are far away.

I love you.

Yours forever and ever,
Victor.

Lucy wrote to Victor.

Hans Crescent, London, June 9.

DEAR VICTOR:

I was so surprised by your letter, I never had an *idea* you felt that way about me. I feel very much touched, and I really do love you as if you were my brother, but we are both *much* too young to talk of anything else. For *goodness sake* don't *think* of writing to Father, for ever so long anyway, he and Mother would *die*, as they still consider me a babe in arms.

You must excuse me for not answering your kind letter before we sailed, but really I hadn't a *minute*. Any *woman* would understand the hubbub and confusion of getting ready for a trip like this, the trips to the *modiste's* and milliner's, as Mother and I both discovered we literally hadn't a stitch to our names, good-

byes to friends, etc., etc., etc., though I don't suppose a *mere man* would!

We had a delightful trip, though at first I suffered from *mal-du-pays* as I thought of home and friends —perhaps one friend in particular, as I looked at the lights on the water, and thought of the way the moon shone on the river that last evening at the Leafs'. But I resolved to be "awfully jolly," as a Mr. Thompson on board was always saying, and not shed a tear (I didn't quite keep *that* resolution!) and I made lots of pleasant acquaintances.

Well, it was *awful* at first! The ship went up and down so! But after two days it was lovely. I had my new blue sailor costume, and we saw a whale and a homeward bound vessel (I couldn't keep back a little sigh as I looked at *that*, I wonder if you can guess why!) and the little whitecaps seemed to be frolicking about the bow of our stately ship—indeed, the wind blew so one day that the sailors had to climb the rigging to reef sail. (Don't I sound nautical?) I found life at sea made everyone very hungry, and ready to do full justice to the *four* meals they had on the ship, breakfast at half past eight, lunch at twelve, dinner at four, and supper at eight.

There were some desperate flirtations on board, of course. Everyone said Mr. Thompson ought to be named Mr. *Spoony*, but he was full of fun and the life of the party. Then there was Mr. Baron, a languid young swell whom I had met at some balls in

New York, so of course he felt in duty bound to come to life and honor me with his attention when he wasn't asleep, which was *generally*. His mother and sister were with him, but Mrs. Baron was too overcome with *mal-du-mer* to make her appearance, and I did *not* care for Miss Baron, who was quite a flirt and apparently did not care much for ladies' society. I think the gentlemen were much nicer than the ladies on the ship; and, by the time the trip was over, we felt as if we had known each other for years, for our vessel was a slow one—as Mr. Thompson said, "An old donkey could go faster." But the days slipped by like magic, although we were all so idle—indeed, the gentlemen seemed to have left all thoughts of business on shore, and the abandon of the ladies was *complete*. Sometimes in the evenings we would have jolly games of "Ruth and Jacob" with everybody joining in, and sometimes just sit up in the bow of the boat, looking at the foam and trying to look into the future. I think my companions would have been surprised if they had known where my thoughts were leading me, Victor!

And here we are in very nice, though rather dark, lodgings, in London! Just think! I can hardly believe it. It looks very dirty, and I know I will be terrified on the streets, and I suppose they will be full of those dreadful people Dickens writes about. The floor is going up and down, just like the deck of the good ship "Hiawatha"—I hope it stops before this

evening, when Mother and I are going to the theatre with Mr. Thompson to see Geneviéve Ward in a play called, I *think*, "Forget-me-not." Mr. Baron has been here too, in lavender kid gloves, with a big bouquet (*already!*) to ask us to the opera tomorrow night, to hear Patti sing. Aren't people kind, and ain't it fun?

This is the longest letter I ever wrote in my life. I put the spray of lilies-of-the-valley you sent me into my prayer-book, and guess where it just *happened* to fall—in the marriage service, where the woman says "I will"!!!

Your affectionate
Lucy.

Hans Crescent, London, June 20.

DEAR VICTOR:

I love getting your letters, but *really* you mustn't write so often—you really, really mustn't. Mother said I must tell you.

Victor, how can you think that I could forget you? You hurt me so when you say things like that. I think of you all the time, and I only don't tell you *what* I think because I don't want to make you vain.

I like London now, it is full of interesting sights, but still I think it is pretty dirty and *old* looking. The gold on the Albert Memorial *certainly* needs rubbing up. We (Mother, Carter Thompson, Percy Baron, and Ethel Baron, whom I like much better now) went to Saint Paul's, and got through our sight-seeing in

time to join in the choral service, with a *large* choir of men and boys. *I* think it would be better if they were given dusters and sent round to dust off the statues which are in every corner. We also attended choral service at Westminster Abbey, where the boys' voices were simply angelic but the *intoning* of the minister almost put us to sleep—*much* too High Church in my humble opinion. You will think we are very *pious*, but we have been to other places of interest too, Madame Tussaud's Wax Works, where Carter simply *convulsed* us by taking the doorkeeper of the Chamber of Horrors for one of the figures, and the British Museum. We spent this afternoon at the latter place, but it will take *fully* another day to see *all* the wonders it contains.

I don't know what you mean, Victor, by saying you feel as if I had forgotten you and home. I would *die* if I thought I was going to spend my life over here. I *don't* think things here are *nearly* as nice as at home, and the British public amuses me *very much;* for while the gentlemen are very handsome, the ladies are dowdy and dress about a year behind our fashions. Mother and I haven't seen *any* bustles as big as ours, and as for the "æsthetes" they simply don't wear any, and look perfectly *ridiculous*, going around in slinky sage green and brick red. The men æsthetes don't cut their hair, and the women apparently never comb theirs, and they all sort of gasp at you. I was telling Carter Thompson about a tea in an artist's studio Mother and

I went to, and he said, "Oh, yes, they hug their knees and stick their chins out and yearn towards a sunflower or a blue china pot!" I nearly died laughing, as it really was a *perfect* description! Carter pretended to be astonished that we had anything to eat (we had heaps of things, and the most *heavenly* strawberries, and cream so thick you had to take it with a ladle). He said, "I thought they always just lunched on a lily." He really is a perfect pickle. One afternoon when, needless to say, it *rained*, we went to an exhibition of Whistler's paintings that he calls *nocturnes;* and Carter made us all laugh by saying "In my humble opinion *Daubs on Blotting Paper* would be a more appropriate name!" I must say they were all Greek to me, including a sort of insect he paints in the corner of each one.

I am *longing* to ride in a hansom cab, but ladies don't do it, alas! Promise not to be shocked to death and don't breathe it to a soul, and I'll tell you something *awful* Ethel and I did with the boys. Mother thought Mrs. Baron was going to matronize us, and Mrs. Baron thought Mother was going to play propriety, so we four went off for an afternoon of sightseeing, all alone! But that isn't the worst, for we decided to come home in an omnibus just for a lark, but *all* the omnibuses going our way were full. We hesitated, but the boys' saying we didn't *dare* ride on top gave us courage; and we mounted amid the smiles of the bystanders, who evidently thought we were

plucky little women to brave the criticisms of the people. Don't tell *a soul*, for if Mother ever heard a word of it she'd lock me up on bread and water.

You'll get tired of reading these long epistles. Don't forget me, Victor! I think of you every single second.

Lucy.

Hans Crescent, London, June 25.

Victor dear, I cried when I read your letter. I love to have you feel that way about me, but I'm not worthy of it.

I did wish for you yesterday. We went to Hampton Court, which is very historical, but the flowers are lovely. I saw a brown butterfly on a blue Canterbury bell, they were just the colors of that old dress I was wearing the first day we met, when you pretended you thought some bows of ribbon on it were butterflies—do you remember? But I know you don't.

You needn't be jealous of Mr. Thompson, for I never was so disappointed in anyone in my *whole life*. He is *not* a gentleman. Yesterday at Hampton Court he made an excuse to get me away from the others, to feed the swans, *he said*, and then proposed, apparently taking it for granted that my answer would, *of course*, be "yes." When I said, which was true, that I was completely taken by surprise, he said "Tell us another one!" and that *I had led him on!* I never want to see

him again as long as I live, and I cried myself to sleep last night.

Oh, Victor, I do miss you so! And I do *love you!*

Your own

Lucy.

Hans Crescent, London, June 26.

DEAR VICTOR:

I wrote you a dreadfully silly letter yesterday, which you mustn't pay any attention to. I was tired and nervous, and got somewhat *hysterical.*

We leave tomorrow for Windermere. I am looking forward very much to seeing the Lakes. We will be travelling about so much that I'm afraid I won't be able to write very often, the days are so full and I am so tired when evening comes. But even if I haven't time to write I will often be thinking of all my friends at home.

Ever your true friend,

Lucy.

London, June 26, Midnight.

Oh, Victor, what made me post such a *horrible* letter to you this morning? Can you ever forgive me and love me again? I didn't mean *one word* of it! Victor, if you ever stop loving me I will die.

Your heartbroken

Lucy.

Old Waverly Hotel, Edinburgh, July 30.

DEAR VICTOR:

I'm so ashamed of not having written for such *ages*, but we have been on the go so hard. If I wrote a letter every time I *thought* of you, you would be swamped, and anyway I *cannot* write about the beautiful and quaint and wonderful things I see in a way that will convey any idea of their loveliness. Sir Walter Scott has described "Bonny Scotland" much better than I can, and then so many things over here are remarkable for nothing else than their oddness. But how often I wish you were here to see everything with me!

We are seeing things under the very *best* auspices, as a *very* nice young man, the Honorable Ronald Marcy-Prince, who is travelling with his tutor, has practically attached himself to us, and is *most* kind about escorting the Mater and me on sight-seeing expeditions when the Pater prefers a nap (which I must confess is *most* of the time.) The Honorable Ronald is the son of Lord Burketter, if you please, so we have the *greatest* attention wherever we go! I must say the importance the English attach to a *title* amuses me *intensely!*

Scotland is *adorable* but so misty it is hard to keep your bangs looking like anything, and for the last two days we have been *enjoying* (?) a pouring rain storm.

I am too sleepy to keep my eyes open any longer, but will write a *real letter* soon.

Your affectionate friend,
Lucy.

P. S.—I enclose a gorse flower—it is *gloriously beautiful* growing, golden yellow and a fragrance all its own, but with lots of thorns. The Honorable Ronald (ahem!) taught me a saying the English have about it—"When the gorse is out of bloom, then kissing's out of fashion." Can you guess why I am sending you a piece?

Chapter Twenty-one

VICTOR, like Lucy's ship, went up and down, as his angel's voice called to him from across the sea that she was missing him so that she nearly *died*, or that the gentlemen of Ireland were the most *awful* flatterers, but somehow you couldn't get angry. He was working in the real estate office of Uncle Willie's friend, Mr. Vernon Johnson. Every morning he yawned down the lane through the morning mists and boarded the 7.17 to Wilmington, carrying a lawyer's green bag that May had made for him, that held three soda biscuits with ham inside them, three with apple jelly, an orange or a pear, and a volume of Zola in French to read on the train, more to impress his fellow travellers than for his own enjoyment.

He sat at his desk and licked stamps, led prospective customers to small brick houses, and swept out the office when the janitor was drunk, through a pink and gold and forget-me-not blue haze—a rainbow dream of Lucy. Oh, he would think, yawning, gazing through the window, he would be rich some day! Lucy, riding behind prancing, perfectly matched horses and a perfectly matched coachman and footman in livery, and simply covered with rubies and pearls, would drive down to the office every afternoon to take him home.

And he saw her more clearly than he saw the gutter-snipe sparrows, cellar doors, and ash-cans his eyes were resting on. Some day! At present his salary was thirty dollars a month.

All his daily life was a blur, a confused murmur, through which came sweet and clear Lucy's messages to the effect that Holland was very flat and full of windmills, that the cathedral at Cologne was too magnificent for description, that at the table d'hotes of Holland and Germany *they helped you to ice-cream twice*, that the Rhine was too beautiful for description, that thousands of plum trees filled the orchards in Prussia, but there seemed to be more apples in Bavaria, that peasants were quaint, that Milan was fascinating, that the pension at Naples had been horrid but very *Italian*, that Rome was simply beyond words, that there were mountains in Switzerland and laces in Brussels, and that the men of Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium stared dreadfully.

"We met a charming young American, named Mr. Duncan, in Amsterdam, full of fun but I'm afraid rather *fast*," wrote Lucy, "He is always saying the funniest things. The other day he said 'Did you ever notice that nearly everything here begins or ends with *dam?* I must say it sounds *rather* profane!' I don't suppose it was quite the thing to say before a *lady*, but he said it with such a solemn face I simply couldn't help bursting out laughing!"

Down went Victor's heart.

"Venice is *absolutely* beyond the powers of my feeble pen. Mother, Father, and I went out in a gondola in the moonlight last night, and Father teased me for moping. The tears *were* very near, though I didn't tell him *why*—that I simply couldn't *bear* being in *Venice*, in the *moonlight*, without you!"

Up flew his heart like a bird in the sky.

"Everywhere in Italy there are the most *perfect* flowers for sale on the streets, and Mr. Duncan, who just *happened* to turn up in Florence, simply *filled* our rooms with them, and sent me a bunch of *orange blossoms*, if you please, which I thought rather *saucy* to say the least!"

Down went his heart like a stone thrown into the sea.

And longer and longer grew the silences between. But just as Victor would begin to emerge from unhappiness and hurt pride into freedom, she would call him back, lovingly and sweetly, to her side.

"Victor! Here we are in *la Belle* France! *Paris*—I can't believe it. It is all my fancy painted it and *much, much* more, such a whirl, the *darlingest* dresses, though I can't expect your highness to be interested in *them*, such gloves, such bonbons! Then the Opera, which is *divine*, I nearly cried my eyes out at 'Faust' the other night, and driving in the Bois, and all Mamma's friends being *hospitality itself* to us. And yet I am homesick—can you guess why?"

Then a long, long silence, no answer to all his letters,

and just as he was getting bitter, sure she had forgotten him, came her photograph from Paul Delahaye in the Rue Lafitte, tinted to show faint pink cheeks and deep blue eyes. Darling little Lucy, so like herself, so unchanged, that he nearly died of love and happiness—Lucy with the biggest bustle in the world, and the sweetest expression, her head a little to one side as if she were listening to the voices of the other angels.

It was too precious to leave out for the girls to see every time they made his bed and filled his pitcher. He kissed it and hid it in a bureau-drawer under his silk muffler, a birthday present from Aunt Priscilla. There were other treasures there, all speaking to him of Lucy—bits of dried vegetation, a slipper bow, a lace pocket-handkerchief, an embossed picture of clasped hands and forget-me-nots from a Christmas cracker, and all her letters.

And then, two years after she had sailed away, and just before she was to sail for home, another letter came.

There it lay on the hall table, white as a feather from an angel's wing. He couldn't even wait until he got it upstairs to his room. He tore it open and read:

Rue d'Alger, Paris, June 14.

DEAR VICTOR:

I hate to write this letter, as I am so afraid it will hurt you, but I couldn't bear to have you hear from

anyone but me of my engagement. I am going to marry Count René de la Villeblanche, the son of one of Mamma's great friends, and I am very happy.

You and I were only children, weren't we, Victor? I realize that now. But I shall always think of our friendship as one of the sweetest things in my life, and I will be wishing your happiness wherever you are and whatever you do. It is sad to say *adieu* to all the old times, and I hope you won't quite forget

Your true friend,
Lucy Hawthorn.

"Is that you, Victor?" asked Maggie, coming up from the cellar, where she had been getting a jar of peach preserves for supper. "There's a letter for you ——oh, you found it. Hurry up if you want to wash your hands, supper's nearly ready."

Victor started upstairs. "Oh, by the way," he called over his shoulders, "Lucy's going to marry a French count——" and his voice suddenly broke into a loud sound, half squawk, half hiccup.

Maggie ran up the stairs after him. "Why, I thought she was engaged to you!"

"So did I—my mistake, evidently."

"But *Victor*——"

"Oh, Maggie!" And he turned his head away, pressing it against the wall, but she could see that he

was crying, and she answered his pain out of the depths of her own.

"Oh, my poor little brother, I know!"

"Nobody knows! Nobody *can* know——"

"Sit down on the stairs a minute—no, the girls won't come in till I call them, they're picking currants in the truck patch. Here, take mine, it's clean, for a wonder——"

"I wish I was dead."

"The nasty little thing—I'd like to wring her neck!" Maggie thought to herself, her arm tight around his shaking shoulders, and added aloud:

"Don't, Victor, don't, she isn't worth it."

He looked at her tragically through red eyes.

"You mustn't say a word against Lucy, Maggie. It isn't her fault—I must have failed her some way——"

"It's her mother's doing, I bet you anything. French count! French no-account more likely. Ambitious old schemer! I never could bear that woman!"

Oh, how could she help him? A passion of pity flooded her. How could she comfort her little brother?

"I only want her to be happy."

And in the dark night of his unhappiness one little star came out and shone faintly—he couldn't help knowing that he was "taking it" wonderfully.

"That's the only thing," Maggie said, her voice gritty with effort. "Don't let love turn into bitter-

ness. And pity Lucy because she's hurt you—you've only been hurt, it won't be so hard for you."

But Victor, still shaking with sobs, did not hear her, for he was looking at Lucy at the end of a vista of years, a tragic figure saying to him through her tears:

"Ah Victor! If only——"

Chapter Twenty-two

RIDICULOUS to feel positively light-headed with high spirits when one is in the middle thirties—Maggie couldn't understand it. Yet that was how she did feel. She wanted to go bounding up into the sky, like a balloon, to sing, shout at the top of her lungs, laugh, not just a little, but loud, with her head back and her mouth wide open. What had gotten into her? She hadn't felt like this for heaven knew how many years. It was the spring, perhaps. Just the first beginning of spring, the soft boundless sky, the flowing wakening air, the sudden, sweet warmth of the sun, the smell of everything, that made her want to laugh and cry at the same time, not gently or sentimentally, but as hard as she could. Spring is not gentle or sentimental, for all its pretty pink and white cloak of blossoming boughs. The wet, new green in the woods, intense in the sunlight, is as fierce as a sword-thrust, flowers in the grass are as awful as stars in the sky. Spring is terrible and divine, tearing the earth wide open, tearing the children of earth.

She really wanted to go to the wedding in Wilmington—not because Victor was going to be an usher, but just because she was bursting for some fun. She hadn't anything fit to wear, but never mind—her

black silk covered her, and nobody would be looking at her, anyway.

But after she put it on, it looked so poky and old-lady that she cut some geraniums as bright as wet, scarlet paint, and a velvet leaf, to put in her belt. She didn't care if it was silly, and her cape would cover them up on the train. And whisking around, getting tea and bread and butter and cottage-cheese, for they didn't need much supper with a wedding reception to look forward to, she sang a song she hadn't thought of for ever so long.

"'I feel, I feel, I feel,
I feel like a morning star!
I feel, I feel, I feel,
I feel like a morning star!
Shoo fly! Don't bother me!
Shoo fly! Don't bother me——'"

Squeak, squeak, squeak, went the pump-handle, out gushed the water. Clash! went the kettle cover. Maggie took a few dance steps on the kitchen floor.

"'Shoo fly! Don't bother me!'

"Ma-ay! Plenty of extra hot water, if you want any! Get-*tout*, kitty, or I'll step on you!

"'Shoo fly! Don't bother me!
For I belong to Company G!'"

"Maggie! I've ripped under my arm!" That was Lily's wail.

"Wait a minute—I'll come and sew you up.

"'Shoo fly! Don't bother me!
Shoo fly——'"

May was a picture in dark red, so much handwork that it made your eyes ache to think of it, and with Mamma's garnet necklace. In the soft afternoon light you couldn't see the fine lines that had come around her mouth and eyes. Lily was in snuff color, with dark blue velvet bows. It was her best dress. She hadn't worn it for months, and it had become ever so much too tight. She couldn't take a long breath, she couldn't lift her arms. Her nose was pink, and tears stood in her eyes.

"Goodness, Lily! This silk gives with every stitch I take. Stop breathing—turn around to the light—turn round. Oh, Lily! I do believe you've got a big spot on the front——"

"I just can't go," Lily quavered.

"Let me think——" And she tried to frown and think about poor fat Lily, but she began to smile, to hum:

"'I feel, I feel, I feel——'

Look—you can take Mamma's lace shawl, it'll hide everything if you're just a little bit careful."

They had put on their best bustles that had been Christmas presents from Aunt Priscilla. For every day May wore a home-made horsehair pad, and Maggie

and Lily rolls of soft paper. These best ones were so large and elaborate that they made the sisters feel fashionable but apprehensive. Lily's was forever getting to one side, and when it came to sitting down gracefully, they all had their bad moments.

They walked down the lane to the station, holding their skirts well up out of the spring mud. Their party slippers, and Cousin Jennie Blodgett's Christmas present gloves still folded in yellow tissue paper, were in bags that swung from their arms, and white zephyr nubias covered their careful coiffures.

"Mercy, this mud is awful—go slowly, girls, we have heaps of time."

"Lily, did you—look out, don't catch your cloud on those twigs. Wait a minute—hold still, I'll get it off—there! Did you remember to put kitty out?"

"Just imagine how the bride must be feeling by now —look, that little patch of grass is ever so green!"

"'Shoo fly! Don't bother me!
Shoo fly! Don't bother me!'"

"What's got into you, Maggie? Hold your skirt up higher in the back."

"Oh, girls, *smell that spring smell!*"

And, as they stepped out of the Wilmington station, the big warm drops began to fall, making dark stars on the pavement. Great, warm, wet splashes of spring rain, falling on her face. Maggie was happy enough to cry.

"We'll take a cab."

"Have you enough with you?"

"Yes, it's all right. We can't walk in the rain in our silks, and with our hair and everything."

They changed into their slippers and pulled on their white gloves, rumbling up Market Street.

"Look—it's raining hard now."

"May, how much do you think I ought to fee the driver?"

"Girls! *Look* at the line of carriages, if you please! Did you ever?"

"Ten cents is *plenty*."

"I know, but it's so wet, and he looked sort of shabby."

"See, they have a red carpet out—I'm glad we changed into our slippers, they won't get a bit wet."

Maggie shoved some money into the driver's hand and hurried after the others. May need never know how much it was, and anyway it was her own egg-money. He looked so forlorn, and his nose was so red, with a little drop trembling from it. She wanted everyone to be happy tonight.

And then the church, and Victor. Lily pretended it was his wedding, and the idea melted her into tears. Where was her handkerchief? She must have brought one——

"Maggie——"

"Yessum."

"I can't find my handkerchief——"

People smiled at each other with knowing little nods. They understood all about it, whatever it was. The organ warbled high and tremulous. Silk rustled past as the ushers towed lady after lady up the aisle.

"What, May?"

"The lilies are too sweet—they make me feel faint."

"Victor looks nice, doesn't he? His coat's just a teeny bit too big, but don't ever tell him so."

"There go the Hollys—I should think she'd be just about dead with that sealskin sacque on a night like this, but let's be stylish or die. I guess they must have driven in, they weren't on the train."

"They're late—the bride is, I mean. I wonder if anything could have happened."

The organ rumbled so that Maggie couldn't hear the rain, but she could feel it falling on her heart, life-giving and warm.

"Here they come!"

The organ agreed. Ta *dar*dy *da!* Ta *dar*dy *da!* The river of white silk and lace, pink sashes, and black coats, the river of life, flowed up the aisle.

The Hollys gave them a lift to the reception; and, as Mrs. Holly wanted to stop at her sister's on the way, just for half a second, they were half an hour late. And then in the room where they took off their wraps Maggie saw a line of white petticoat showing under Lily's skirt, and had to stop for that.

"Walk off, Lily—nobody's going to notice—walk off a little way—here, back up."

"*Ouch*, Maggie!"

"Oh, did I run it into you? You're all right now. Come on, girls!"

For two pins she'd slide down the banisters! Clatter, scream, a little thread of "Il Bacio" as they pushed slowly past the orchestra under the stairs. May talked to her sisters vivaciously, as if she had just been introduced to them, but her eyes wandered anxiously.

"What a lovely wedding!"

"Doesn't the bride look sweet?"

What a lovely wedding! Doesn't the bride look sweet? What a lovely wedding! Doesn't the bride look sweet?

May had a man now, and was shrieking at him through the racket. Maggie and Lily were carried on by the tide.

"See, Lily, how nice our present looks."

They hadn't been able to afford anything new. There were the pair of high-shouldered dark blue vases with the gold polka-dots and white stomachers painted with seaweed and shells, that had stood on the dining-room mantelpiece practically forever. How surprised they must be at their new surroundings, a blue velvet case of pearl-handled fish knives on one side, pink cake-plates with gold stippling on the other, and an onyx clock with a bronze Minerva behind them. It seemed almost disloyal to go away and leave them there—such old friends.

Lily found a nice little corner where she was hidden away and didn't have to bother about her bustle or her petticoat or keeping her shawl just so. When the colored waiter thrust the plate into her hands, she tried to explain that she had already had one supper, but he hurried away without paying any attention. So she ate the broiled oysters and chicken salad lingeringly, shedding a sentimental tear now and then when the violin, close by her ear, grew extra piercing.

Maggie was just going to dive in after her when Mrs. Craig backed her against a palm.

"Oh, Miss Campion! Well! I haven't seen you, since dear knows when—how are you? Wasn't it a pretty wedding? And dear little Annie made such a sweet bride, didn't she? Have you had your supper? I thought the mayonnaise was sort of *poor*, didn't you? But then I'm fussy about mayonnaise, I guess, at least so they always tell me—and then there's always so much celery in caterer's chicken salad—more of everything than chicken. I said to Mr. Craig, I guess the chicken this salad was made of had a mother that mooed and had horns and four legs—look! That dress with the orange trimmings—someone ought to tell her how she looks, really it would be kinder. Fat people ought to be careful what they wear."

So they ought, thought Maggie, looking at Mrs. Craig's round little body almost bursting out of its rose-colored silk. Just like a watermelon, and those jet buttons were the watermelon seeds.

" 'I feel, I feel, I feel,
I feel like a morning star——' "

Oh, she must get that out of her head.

"Frank! Coo-hoo! Frank! You've met my husband, haven't you, Miss Campion? Frank, I could eat another plate of ice-cream if I was sufficiently urged, couldn't you, Miss Campion? *Couldn't* you? *Frank!* Miss Campion says she couldn't. Just one, dear. Just one. *Frank!* Unless you want one yourself! Have you seen the presents? Well, to tell you the *honest* truth I was surprised they weren't handsomer—oh, stop that waiter—waiter! Try this punch, I think there's champagne in it——"

Maggie moved her head away from the palm sticking into the back of her neck. Mercy, how the woman buzzed!

" 'Shoo fly! Don't bother me!' "

"I was looking at the presents with Edward Post and his wife, and he was saying that the worst of getting married——"

The glass of punch leapt on Maggie's plate.

"Edward——?"

"Edward Post. Didn't you know him when he lived with the Allens, years ago, before he went to South America? You must have, they lived so near you. Why, yes, seems to me I've heard he was quite a beau of yours, haven't I? Didn't you see him and his wife this evening?"

Maggie set down her chattering glass and plate on the corner of the mantelpiece. She was shivering all over. Mrs. Craig's face floated towards her, burst into splinters of brightness and blackness. She heard her own voice say, high and unfamiliar, an affected society voice:

"No, I didn't see him. In fact, I hadn't heard he was married."

And she laughed nervously, politely, leaning against the wall to keep from falling.

"Oh, yes, indeed, very much so, he has been for two years. In fact he married a distant connection of Mr. Craig's—*too* bad you didn't meet her, but they left very early. Of course, they don't live here, but he comes on sometimes on business, I understand—not that Mr. Craig and myself see much of them; just between you and me I think success has turned his head a little. She had a *very* pretty dress on, a pink corded silk, not exactly *pink*, more *peach*—look! Will you *look* at Mr. Craig! He's lost me completely—look at that *hopeless* expression. See, he doesn't see us at all! Frank! Oh, Frank, honey—I'll just have to chase after him——"

Maggie went upstairs to the bedroom, empty except for heaps of cloaks, drifts of nubias, foot-hills of storm-boots, and huddled in a dark corner. Her geraniums fell from her belt and lay on the floor beside her, as red as a pool of blood. She felt as if she were bleeding to death. She had never really said

goodbye in her heart to Edward. But now she knew that the footsteps she had listened to for so long would never reach her.

"'Goodnight, ladies! I'm going to leave you now!'"

"I don't feel a bit sleepy. Didn't Victor look wonderful? I don't think it's prejudice, I think he really *was* far and away the best looking usher, don't you? Just imagine the way we'll be feeling when he's the bridegroom!"

"Is he coming home or spending the night in town? Well, I'll leave out some sponge-cake and milk anyway. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

"Lily, did you see to kitty?"

"Someone stood all over my slippers—look, one bow's lost!"

"Goodnight, I guess I am sleepy after all. Oh, I brought home some wedding-cake to dream on—want some, May? Maggie! Want some wedding-cake to dream on?"

Chapter Twenty-three

WHILE we still feel that we are just entering the sea we look back, and how far we have come! How far away are the seashells and sandcastles of childhood. We can see them, but we can't go back to them. No matter how tired or frightened we are, we have to swim on out to sea.

Forty-one years old! Maggie couldn't believe it. She didn't feel forty-one a bit! Of course, she was often tired now—she, who had never been tired. But she got up so early and went so hard all day. And then sometimes she didn't sleep very well, but that was when she let herself think of Edward.

Forty-one! Mamma had only been forty-two when she died—impossible to be almost as old as Mamma, almost disrespectful. And she couldn't feel grown-up inside her—or did older people have these young feelings—were they shy, not quite sure of themselves, glowing with love at a kindness, delighted with something pretty to wear or something good to eat, and sometimes wanting more than anything to stick out their tongues and make faces—and did they just hide them under dark clothes and quiet ways?

The Campions were so poor that they were all trying to earn a little extra money. Twice a week Maggie

drove in to The Woman's Exchange with her cakes and May's lampshades and little crêpe paper baskets to hold candies or ice-cream. Such pretty baskets, pale violet with purple paper violets tied with a bow of baby ribbon to the handle, pale green with buttercups, and pink with something charming, though none of them quite knew what. Or sometimes the baskets were like big cabbage roses. When there was a special order Maggie would help. Lily longed to help too, but her clumsy fingers tore the thin tissue paper and dropped glue on May's exquisite petals, and her violets weren't violets, but only crumpled balls, good for nothing but for the kitten to pat across the room and pounce on. So she read aloud to them while they worked, "Ships That Pass in The Night" and "Sweet Bells Out of Tune," nearly yawning her head off, and driving them wild, by pausing every now and then to read ahead to herself a little, just to see what was going to happen.

She was trying to earn something, too, by giving music lessons. She wasn't very accurate, but her four pupils were all beginners, and she could play over their pieces, "Joy and Frolic Galop," "The Little Penitent," "The Brooklet," or "Dolly's Funeral," with a great deal of ripple and expression. She had Sissie and Mary Holly, Stewy Grant's little boy, and Miss Taylor, the postmaster's daughter; and most of the lesson times were taken up in cozy chats, telling her troubles, offering freshly baked cookies and having

one or two herself, or taking her pupils into the garden to see Maggie's Oriental poppies.

"Music seems to mean so much to me!" Lily often said, and she was a trifle complacent at not being able to listen without tears to "Ten thousand times ten thousand," that had been sung at Mamma's funeral. "It's funny, music always makes me feel like praying." But everything made Lily feel like praying. Her bedtime prayers were so long and elaborate that, over and over again, she fell asleep in the midst of them, waking up later cold and stiff and drenched with moonlight. She had become very High Church, and while she hadn't quite the courage to call Mr. Nelson "Father Nelson," especially as he had a large family, her genuflections, and crossings, and flopping down on her knees in the middle of the Nicene Creed, provided much material for conversation at the Sunday dinner tables of the rest of the congregation. "Regular Roman Catholic!" was the general opinion. It was a dreadful nuisance having to have an egg or sardines for her on Fridays, and Maggie was always forgetting. Once they had had chicken salad for Friday supper, and Lily hadn't been able to keep from crying.

She thought of Lord Jesus so much, Gentle Jesus, who had loved her—and all mankind, of course—so much that he had died for her; and thinking of him her blue eyes swam with tears, her whole body seemed to melt into tears, tender and warm as spring rain.

"We must try to please our dear Lord Jesus Christ,

children, mustn't we?" she would say to her Sunday school class, and the little boys would look back at her solemnly from above ruffled collars and butterfly bows, the little girls from under hats like saucers holding cones of ice-cream, and agree politely; "Yes, Miss Lily."

She did try so hard to please him, and live the spiritual life. Arranging the bouquets in Grandmother's brass altar vases, she couldn't help feeling sometimes, when there were strangers who had come early, that they might be whispering, as she made the flowers spray out or knelt before the altar, touched by the sunlight falling through the amber glass, "What a spiritual face! Who is she?"

Her Sunday school class! Her altar flowers! She was bursting with enthusiasm at first; and, when they got to be dreadful bores, she wouldn't admit it even to herself. For if they were gone what would be left?

For a little while she thought Mr. Marshall would be left. She met him at Hessie Farley's Valentine euchre party, in a romantic setting of red cardboard hearts, heart-shaped sandwiches, heart-shaped cakes with beetroot-reddened icing, and large crimson hearts of geranium blossoms. Mrs. Farley talked for a year about how much trouble it had all been. He was a rather wooden gentleman, but Lily garlanded him with the vine leaves of her imagination, and at parting he humorously offered her his score-card heart, and asked if he might call some Saturday evening.

"Most evenings my rule is early to bed—'early to bed, early to rise,' you know! But on Sundays I sleep an hour later in the morning, so I sit up an hour later on Saturday nights," he explained.

So Lily, all in a flutter, took to running across the road to see old Mrs. Clark on Saturday evenings, hoping that Mr. Marshall would come to call.

"Good evening, Miss Campion. Is Miss Lily in?"

"Good evening, Mr. Marshall. Excuse me a moment and I'll call my sister—she's just across the road. She goes so often to see a poor old neighbor."

And Mr. Marshall would think reverently, "Sweet Saint Charity!"

She tried to open doors into a world of wonders for Mrs. Clark.

"You know in India there's a wonderful building called the Taj Mahal, all carved out of marble so that it looks as fine as lace, that an Indian rajah built in memory of his wife."

"Patience guide me! Squaws they call them, don't they? My nephew Will's wife sent me a picture last week from the World's Fair, and it said on it 'Chief Big Crow and his squaw Little Cloud.' "

"But this is a different kind of Indian, Mrs. Clark—Indians that live in *India*, way across the ocean, and ride around on elephants——"

"Well, different kind or not, I wouldn't trust 'em. Scalp you as soon as look at you, I've always heard tell."

And all the time Lily was listening for the click of the gate, steps on the path, Maggie's breathless voice saying, "Lily! Mr. Marshall's over at the house!" But he never came, and it just let her in for a tiresome custom, for what could she do when Mrs. Clark greeted her with, "I was just settin' here in the dark feelin' so lonesome, and hopin' my uttermost best that you'd come!"

Every Saturday night Lily carried a bunch of flowers to Mrs. Clark, so that Mr. Clark's grave, conveniently next to the Methodist Church, might be admired on Sunday. Suppose, just suppose, that Mr. Marshall arrived some evening as she came down the drive under the shadowy pines, her arms full of feathered tulips—or coppery snapdragon and creamy roses, as time went on—or asters—chrysanthemums—tulips——

"Where are you taking your armful of flowers?"

"I'm just running across the road—I take them every week to a poor old neighbor, to put on her husband's grave."

And he would say, a note of reverence stealing into his voice:

"Sweet Saint Charity!"

Mrs. Clark looked critically at each Saturday's offering. She had a reputation to keep up.

"Thank you kindly. Them white roses last week was as beautiful as if they'd been artificial—I suppose they're all gone? Everybody always admires poor

Lewis's grave, it has the handsomest bouquets of any in the graveyard."

"The old show-off!" Maggie exclaimed crossly, picking her prettiest roses for the Saturday bouquet.

Everybody came to The Maples for flowers, Maggie complained; but she was proud, too. Taking care of the garden used up all the time she had left from cooking and the house. Just picking the sweet-peas took hours, although all three of them picked. It was such hot work, picking out there in the truck patch, remembering to snip off old blossoms and seed-pods, and not pick sprays with buds. Lily cheated sometimes, and May relieved the monotony by spelling out the names of men she knew—a flower to a letter. *A*, *b*, *c*, three sweetpeas, then eight sweetpeas for *h*, then one for *a*, and so on, to spell "Charles Bradley," or some other man. She pretended it was a little charm that would make them think of her lovingly.

They were all so bored with the work of picking and arranging, and yet complacent about it, for people were always saying to them, "*Nobody* has such sweet-peas as yours!" The milkpails full of water waited among the little green windfalls under the apple trees by the edge of the truck patch. Great milkpails full of sweetpeas, shading from white to palest pink through to almost black, and the special milkpail for the ones from light violet to deep purple. May would bury her face in them, kissing them, pouring out her love on them.

She had so much love to give, she longed for so much love. And the lonely years were flowing past so quickly. As she covered the enormous lampshade frames, with puffed and flounced silk, lace petticoats, and bunches of artificial flowers caught by ribbon bows, all of her but the little bit of her brain that directed her flashing fingers was lost in a dream of love. She was with her lover, cheek to cheek they spoke to each other in low and broken voices, their fingers laced together——

"Oh, my darling, where are you? Come to me, save me, before it's too late!"

"I *am* young!" she cried to herself. "Are you?" her mirror answered as she sat before it trying her hair in different ways until late, late into the night.

There were little lines on her face—yes, but only in a strong light. And what had become of the lovely warm rose of her cheeks? Well, anyone might be pale.

In one of the fashion magazines Aunt Priscilla lent them, were directions for making a collarette of pale pink chiffon. The magazine said it would cast a youthful and becoming glow. There was plenty of crumpled pink chiffon in the piece box, from the front of an evening dress Maggie had worn when she was engaged to Edward, and some odds and ends of ecru lace for trimming. It tied with broad satin ribbon—she bought that. She had to buy something *sometimes*, she told herself defiantly. Hers was prettier than the one in the magazine. And yet, when it was

done, and she looked at herself in the glass, she burst into tears. What was the use?

But she *would* be young. You weren't old just because you'd lost your color and looked rather tired.

In a Philadelphia shop where no one would know her, she bought a box of rouge, asking for it in such a low voice that she had to repeat the dreadful word.

"For amateur theatricals," she told the shopgirl haughtily.

She put a little on when she dressed to go into Wilmington to a subscription dance with Victor, who was always going to dances. Generally he went to dinners before, but this time he offered to take the girls in. Maggie only laughed, and Lily was frightened at the idea, but May wanted to go.

Her dress was pretty, she knew that, with gold-colored dots all over the white net skirt, and big balloon sleeves of gold-colored velvet, and she had brand new bronze slippers with high heels and tiny pointed toes in her slipper-bag. She and Victor had to run for the train along the frozen ruts, their breath puffing out, turning to little white clouds. Fun to run, as if you were a little girl again!

"This air—like champagne—It makes me feel—as if I were—fizzing——"

"Just in time! Here she comes!"

"*Whoo!* My side! I never—saw— *whoo!*—such bright stars!"

In the train the windows were all steamy. Her

cheeks were glowing, her eyes felt big and shining. People were looking at her. Victor began to whistle "Ever of Thee" under his breath, and her feet danced a tiny waltz under her skirt. She could see herself entering the ball-room, pausing a moment, unconscious of the sensation she was making. The orchestra was playing "Ever of Thee," and the music caught her up, she danced on its waves light as sun-gilded foam on the waves of the sea.

"Gad, what a narrow escape! I almost didn't come tonight—and I might never have met you!

"Your eyes are as deep as pools in a dark forest—I am drowning in them."

Oh!

He *might* be there, whoever he was, wonderful, different from all the world, knowing at a glance how different she was, too.

But in the dressing-room, where the débutantes were pulling on their gloves, pinning great puddings of violets on to themselves (and they needed a great deal of anchoring) and looking over their shoulders at the new glory of their trains, she felt old and cold. Just the way they stopped pushing each other aside from the pier-glass, and made way for her, just their polite changed voices when they spoke to her.

Victor was kind—she didn't want him to be. She danced three times, Victor, Raymond Line, a mature demure hop with old Judge Kelsey; and then talked

brightly, feverishly to Mrs. Kelsey through one dance —two dances—three dances——

Holding up her train and looking at it with a worried little frown, she hurried from the ball-room. It was torture to go through the ranks of "stags," with their glove-fitting, white waistcoats, their chins propped up by their high collars, their hair parted in the middle and plastered down on either side.

"Not deserting us, Miss Campion?"

"Oh, no, indeed, but a stitch in time, you know!"

In the dressing-room she peeled off her gloves, took off a slipper and put it on again, looked in the mirror and touched her hair, drew out a hair-pin and pushed it in, touched her puffed sleeves, pulled out Mamma's lace wedding handkerchief and just touched it to her nose, tucked it away. If only the colored maid hadn't stood there, looking at her, she could have cried a little and felt better. But she couldn't stay in the dressing-room all night. Humming a waltz tune she drew her gloves on slowly.

Two girls burst in, warm, tingling, with melted stars in their eyes, and moist bright cheeks. They really did need repairs! One's hair was coming down, and the other had torn off yards of flounce.

"My *dear! Every* waltz with J.!"

"I *didn't!* Well, anyway, *you* needn't talk! Oh, that awful barn dance! I haven't a hair-pin left, and I look like a freak!"

"It wrecks one's coiffure, doesn't it?" said May eagerly, and one girl stared at her, while the other, who knew her, replied politely:

"Yes, indeed, Miss Campion."

And then in her natural voice, a voice quivering with joy, singing with the knowledge of her prettiness, her white satin gown, her dance-card cram-jam full, and J. waiting for her, she cried to her friend:

"My dear! Look at the way these flowers have stained my new dress, if you please! I'm simply broken-hearted!"

Maggie slept lightly, dozing, waking, until she was sure "the children" were safely home. And after she heard their doors shut, she began to wonder if they had remembered to put out the hall lamp. Oh, it was much too cold to get up! But still, she wouldn't be able to go to sleep until she was sure.

In the hall she thought she heard the sound of sobbing from May's room, but, when she called softly through the crack of the door, "May! Are you all right?" there was silence. She must have heard the wind that had risen and was crying around the house.

Still, it was a relief to hear from May next morning that she had had a beautiful time, when Maggie brought her breakfast up to her to have in bed, late, for a treat.

"Did you have a good time?"

"Wonderful! Heavenly music, and the floor was divine."

"Who did you have for partners? Anyone I know?"

"I–don't–believe so. Most of them were strangers. Everyone's wearing things in their hair, Maggie—I was glad I wore my gold lace butterfly, though it was very modest and meek compared to the diamond stars and crescents and things most of them had. Mrs. Kelsey had gold antennæ with diamond dangles on the tips."

"Mrs. Kelsey with antennæ!" cried Maggie scornfully. "She's a right hefty butterfly, is all *I* have to say. Didn't everyone think your dress was pretty?"

"I guess so."

"Didn't you dance with *any*one I know?"

"Judge Kelsey and Raymond Line, but they weren't exactly *thrilling*. Here's my card, but they're mostly initials."

And there it was, as full as could be, every waltz and barn dance and *pas de quatre* filled in by May herself with different handwritings.

"My, you must have had fun! Victor said you were evidently having a violent flirtation in some cozy corner, he hardly saw you all evening except at supper. Was it good? What did they have? I ought to be down making doughnuts."

"Oh, broiled oysters and salad—*you* know."

"May Campion! Who's A. J.? *Every* waltz with

A. J.! 'Love's Kiss,' A. J., '*Je T'Aime*,' A. J., '*Mia Cara*,' A. J., 'Love's Confession,' A. J.—why, *May!* Well, you certainly made a conquest—who in the world's A. J.? Do I know him?"

"No, he doesn't live in Wilmington. He came from a long way off."

Chapter Twenty-four

AUNT PRISCILLA trailed across the fields under the soft spring sky, bringing her nieces the latest installment of "Trilby" in Harper's Magazine. There were sticky circles all over the cover—how had they gotten there? Jelly glasses? She licked a finger and tried to wipe them off, but it only made them look worse. "Oh, fie!" she said out loud to herself, scrubbing away with a rather grubby finger.

A bird flew from the grass at her feet with a soft whirr of wings, up into the sky. "*Goody!*" cried Aunt Priscilla, startled; and added, "Cunning little fellow!" And she went on talking to herself as she climbed over the stile and plodded up through the garden, "Willie would have gone fishing on a day like this——"

The tears rose in her eyes and spilled over. They were always rolling down her cheeks now, every time anything made her think of Uncle Willie. And everything made her think of him, she was so lost without him.

"How does anyone ever get used to their husband being dead, or their wife?" she asked Maggie miserably, sitting down in the kitchen rocking-chair, out of

the way of whisking drops of the purple dye in which Maggie was stirring May's old cream-colored challis.

"Some people get used to it easy enough," Maggie answered briskly, her heart aching with pity. "Look at Cousin Sam and his Daisy."

"I know—Sam's sixty-five, the old foolish, and she's only twenty-four."

"So she says, but I bet she's thirty-five if she's a day. Poor Cousin Lizzie!"

"You know, Maggie, I see a sort of likeness to Lizzie in May, every now and then. The way Lizzie used to be when she was younger."

"Oh, I don't, Aunt Priscilla," said Maggie, looking troubled, for she did. "Poor May! She don't have much fun, and she's so bright and pretty—I've been worried about her. She's a funny one, too; she went to a dance in Wilmington and had a wonderful time, and yet, I haven't been able to persuade her to go to another since. But she has a new beau named Wadsworth Robinson, he seems kind of silly to me, but he certainly is devoted, and May acts happier than she has in a long time. I wish she'd get married, and Victor, too——"

"Oh, Victor's so young!"

"He's thirty-one—don't seem possible, does it? Look, this is a pretty color, don't you think? I believe I'll slip up and get my old tan cape and dye that—and Victor has some light ties that look kind of shabby. No, I don't believe he's ever gotten over Lucy Haw-

thorn, nasty little flirt. Of course, he's liked lots of girls, and you know he's *ever* so popular, Aunt Priscilla, he's in demand for all the parties and germans and débutante dinners—rosebud dinners, they call them—but there hasn't been anything serious since Lucy, and I just wish he'd fall in love—goodness, is that the front door?"

"I'll go," Aunt Priscilla offered, thinking it was probably the lady selling soap and vanilla and white rose perfume who had been at her house a little earlier. But, when she opened the door, there was Sam Blow's bride, dressed to kill in a cape of nut-brown velvet lined with gold-colored satin, with three flaring collars trimmed with gold lace, and holding her nut-brown velvet skirt high enough to show bronze shoes with sharp, tiny points and *Louis Quinze* heels. "As high as stilts," Aunt Priscilla thought, trying to squat a little to hide her own old cloth sided boots. A hat with an openwork jet brim and a crown of brown velvet wreathed with yellow velvet roses and black ostrich tips, perched high on her much too yellow hair; and turquoise lizards and enamelled spiders and beetles with garnet and diamond eyes crawled all over her.

"Daisy Blow's in the parlor!" Aunt Priscilla panted to Maggie.

"Oh, Aunt Priscilla! Oh, I *can't* come! Oh, *bother*—oh, *dear!* What did she have to come for? Go on in, like an angel, and I'll come just as soon as ever I can——"

And she rushed around, taking the dye off the stove —*mercy!* Of course, she had to splash some out! Then up the back stairs to scrub with soap and water —she was purple from top to toe—give a yank to her hair, and kick into her beaded slippers—that would have to do. She looked like fury, but she couldn't help it.

She didn't like Daisy Blow. She looked fast, and and she certainly was painted black around the eyes, for it had smudged a little. And what a lot of "Héliotrope Blanc," perfume, the woman was drenched in it. And such airs over that huge bunch of violets, telling them that the *fin de siècle* girl wouldn't consider herself dressed for out-of-doors without one. Maggie felt a sudden warm gush of affection for shabby, shy old Aunt Priscilla, with her corsets sticking out in a ridge and powdered sugar all down her front.

Conversation creaked along, heavy and slow.

"We thought you and Cousin Sam were still in New York."

"We came down three days ago. Sammy wanted to rusticate a bit and see his beloved horses. I tell him he loves them much better than he loves poor little me. Just between you and I, my adored Sammy is one of those social Hottentots, who thinks the conventions of Society's charmed circle are absurd, and pines for the wilds of the country, while I am *désolée* away from town."

"You'll find it's right nice here now that it's spring," said Aunt Priscilla, and added in a little rush of confidence, "My peach tree is in bloom!"

"Is that so?"

Everyone paused.

"Meadowbrook's such a nice house," Maggie offered.

"Oh, my dear! It's so old-*fashioned!* Of course, Sammy gives me *carte blanche*, as they say, and I'm going to try to brighten it up a little, but I fear me 'tis a hopeless task. Perhaps, it will be more liveable when we have a telephone put in, and electric lights."

"*Boastie!*" thought Maggie, going into the dining-room, fiercely hospitable, to get out home-made wine and the Christmas fruit-cake; and Aunt Priscilla's eyes were nearly popping out of her head.

They sat making conversation together and taking little nibbles and sips of cake and wine; Maggie and Aunt Priscilla stiff and shy, the new Mrs. Blow grand and uneasy, until the door banged, and there was Victor. And then the caller came to life indeed. "*My!*" thought Aunt Priscilla.

"*Whew!*" cried Maggie, dashing around, flinging up windows as soon as Daisy Blow drove away. "*Whew, whew, whew!* I never smelled so much perfume in my life! *Whew!*"

"Methinks, my lady's auriferous tresses are too good to be true," said Victor.

"Hmm! Methinks, you seemed to admire them, all the same."

"There aren't any flies on Cousin Daisy," Victor admitted, smiling complacently into the mantelpiece mirror.

"Well, there's everything else—turquoise *bugs* and things, I never saw anything like it. And she certainly ain't a lady—why, she don't even speak good grammar. Here's her handkerchief, absolutely *reeking*, now what am I going to do with that?"

"I have to go by there tonight, I'll take it over," said Victor, and he put it into his pocket and went upstairs, two steps at a time, singing at the top of his lungs:

> " 'Daisy, Daisy,
> Give me your answer true,
> I'm half crazy,
> All for the love of you——' "

Maggie and Aunt Priscilla looked at each other.

"*My!*" said Aunt Priscilla.

On Saturday afternoons Victor taught Daisy to ride a bicycle. He rolled her round and round the drive at "Meadowbrook," while she, in a balloon-sleeved pink shirtwaist with a stiff white linen collar, and a small grey Fedora hat, leaned against him shrieking at the top of her lungs. And Daisy in a white silk tea-gown with lace frills and a Watteau pleat, with red silk stockings and slippers, taught Victor to make Welsh rarebits in the chafing dish.

"*Now* the beer goes in," and she leaned against him, her perfumed hair brushing his cheek. Heavens, he was slow! But there was something sweet about him, too, and she was bored to death with her poor, dear, old Sam, snoring in his den fit to raise the roof.

Or Victor took snap photographs of Daisy with her French poodle.

"Now waltz with Missy, Pompon," Daisy would cry, seizing his paws when the posing was over, and the little black legs would scrabble as Victor whistled "*Je t'aime.*" "Muzzer's precious pet!" Daisy murmured, covering Pompon with kisses, and looking up coquettishly at Victor. "It's love me, love my dog, isn't it, my poodlums?" Pompon had his own little bed, with tucked and lace-trimmed sheets and a blue silk coverlet, his own trunk to hold his ribbons and collars. "Imagine old Snap!" exclaimed Lily, awed, when Victor told the girls about it.

His sisters decided to give a party for Victor. Maggie said it was only polite when he'd gone to so many, and paid no attention to his protests. He didn't want a party. The girls didn't realize how elaborate parties were nowadays, and he couldn't imagine his friends from town in the shabby dining-room, with Papa's old desk and Mamma's oil paintings, and the stains on the ceiling where the pipes had burst. But what could he feel but embarrassed gratitude, looking at his sisters' glowing faces as they planned his party for him?

The supper table was really lovely—May arranged it, humming to herself, happy and light, seeing herself as Wadsworth Robinson saw her. The centerpiece was a mass of pansies tumbling from a torn straw garden hat, glistening here and there with touches of gold paint. And over the pansies flights of yellow and violet butterflies trembled on finest wires from the new lampshade of violet crêpe paper.

Maggie was on a rampage in the kitchen, cutting up chickens for the salad, slicing cold ham that crumbled with tenderness, buttering bread for the cucumber sandwiches. She was going to have nice things for Victor's party, if they had to live on mush and molasses for the rest of the year. She murmured to herself a rosary of delicious dishes.

"Salmon croquettes—all ready to heat—beaten biscuit—*they're* done—angel's food—ice-cream—Jake's going to freeze it—coffee—I can tend to that when I slip out to heat the croquettes—Ma–ay! Front door bell!"

"Li-ly! Door bell!"

And there was Daisy Blow, with an armful of lace tablecloth, and her coachman with baskets of candlesticks and pink china and goodness knew what.

"My dear, I simply ran over with some little things for tonight—oh, Pompon, petsums, *did* his Auntie Lily step on him? He says *he* fordives her, he knows she didn't mean to hurt poor Pompon—*oh, shut up, Pomp!* Is Snap around anywheres? He and Pompon—*look!*

I brought this lace tablecloth and the pink satin one for underneath to show through—that's the *dernier cri*, you know. And the table mirror and the china swan to go on it are in one of the baskets—bring them in, Pete—see, isn't that *chick?* I always put that in the center, then the flowers round it, and these silver candlesticks with the pink candles and sweet little pink silk shades—I said to Cousin Victor last night, 'I'm just going to bundle up some things and bring them over——' "

"May's finished the table, I'm afraid."

"Let's see! How do—oh, gracious! Too bad I was so slow, but I'm such a sleepyhead in the morning, and my old Sambo spoils me—oh, *too* bad you have a violet lampshade, I brought over everything pink. Haven't you some pink silk or something you could just run up into a little shade?"

The butterflies that had been quivering in a delicate living cloud turned back into paper and wire; the new lampshade looked just what it was, a makeshift.

"Aren't you girls the smart ones? Who else in the *world* would have fixed up an old hat for a centerpiece?" Who else would want to, her expression said. And though they didn't *want* Daisy Blow's lace tablecloth and bisque swan, somehow there they were on the table—"just to try——"

"Isn't it a *dream? Sure* you don't mind? Look at these little pink silk candleshades—look! I paid ever so much for them in New York. All puffly ruffly,

just like dreat bid drowed up lampshades, wasn't they, Pompon? Pompon says, 'yes, jus' *zackly*.' And I brought over a box of pink and silver *dragées* I happened to have—they're not much to eat, in fact they're left over from a couple of dinner parties, but they match the candles and candlesticks. Those butterflies—hmm. They're the cutest things I ever did see, but they don't just exactly go with the pink, do they? I have an idea——"

"Don't let it get away," said Lily, feeling daring. That was what Victor always said. It was exciting, to see all this pink and silver glowing and gleaming around their old dining-room—horrid, if May minded, but exciting.

"I'll dash home and get some accordion-pleated chiffon I've just had done for a teagown—there's yards and yards of it, we can catch it round the lamp —we'll all be raving beauties in its roseate glow. And Mose has a lot of pink begonias in the conservatory, they'd match better than the pansies—do you want any more silver, while I'm over? Some bonbon dishes or anything? I said to Cousin Victor, I'd *adore* to bring anything, I know you live simply and why *should* you have a lot of things? Come on, Pompon, come on, Mudder's boy——"

Maggie came in from the kitchen, sniffing. "Daisy Blow's been here," she said, and then: "Oh, *May!* Your *table!*"

"Daisy's been rearranging it," said May listlessly.

"Why on earth did you let her? Such impertinence!"

"It's the *dernier cri*," Lily explained.

"Well, it looks like fury! We don't want Mrs. Sam Blow's things!"

"Oh, Maggie, who cares? Victor will think it's perfect if wonderful marvellous Cousin Daisy did it."

"*Hmp!* May Campion, where are all your butterflies?"

"I threw them away." May opened her clenched hand, and looked at one little butterfly lying crushed on her palm. "Daisy didn't think they went with the pink candleshades."

"Oh, she didn't, didn't she? You've been working on those butterflies for nights and nights. Who's giving this party, anyway?" asked Maggie furiously.

She asked it again through the evening, as Daisy dominated everything, a jewelled dagger thrust through her yellow hair, her cheeks plushy pink, as vivid as the great pink puffs of her sleeves. "That certainly is paint," Maggie said to herself. Victor thought Daisy was all that was bright and beautiful, as she made him balance a caramel on his nose, pretending he was Pompon, slipped a piece of ice down Wadsworth Robinson's collar, or led the chorus of groans and laughter when the booby prize was given to Raymond Line—a stuffed calico rabbit, "Representing your *hare*-breadth escape from winning the first prize," Victor said.

"Screeching like a guinea-hen!" thought Maggie. "What Victor can see in her——"

Whatever it was he saw, Cousin Sam saw it too. Old and tired and silly, trying to act as young as the others, you could see his heart in his eyes as he looked at Daisy.

And just before supper, going out on the river porch to get the cream, where she had put it to keep it safe from Kitty, there were Daisy and Victor smoking together!

"I guess you think it's real wicked for this little girl to be smoking a cigarette," said Daisy, and Maggie answered, "No," and stalked into the house, bursting to add, "Not wicked, just cheap and silly!" She pretended not to hear Victor call after her, "Cousin Daisy certainly has made the party a success, hasn't she, Maggie?"

She had been afraid they would notice, when she went out to get the supper ready, and had thought what to answer if anyone asked, "Where are you going?" She would either say "To China!" or "Heigho for meddlers!" But no one noticed. "Well, I didn't want them to," she said, putting the croquettes into the oven and giving the door a good hard slam.

She had meant what she said when she told Aunt Priscilla that she wished Victor would fall in love with someone, but she certainly hadn't been thinking of anyone like Daisy Blow.

Chapter Twenty-five

"YOU mark my words, Lily—Wadsworth Robinson is going to make May an offer, and what's more, I believe she's going to take him. Look—he's really not bad looking—not *handsome*, but kind of nice——"

Lily joined Maggie in gazing out from behind a pinch back of bedroom window curtain. Mr. Robinson propped his bicycle against a tree, took off the clips that held his white tennis trousers tight around his ankles, straightened a small white hat above his serious red-brown face, and took a box from the net hammock on his handlebars. "Chocolates," said Lily.

May had been watching, too, with a feeling of fingers closing around her heart, squeezing it lightly. Her knees trembled and she felt suddenly weak, and had to sit down on her bed a moment—had to fling herself down with her face in the pillow.

She knew that he loved her, that he was going to ask her to marry him. And she was going to marry him. She shook with fascinated terror, dark excitement. This way, alone, with her face pressed into the pillow, she loved him.

She got up, patted a dust of powder over her flaming

cheeks, and ran downstairs, and her sisters heard her company voice cry:

"Why, I didn't know you were here! Isn't it a heavenly day for tennis? Victor's gone over for Daisy, they'll be here soon, I guess."

If only he had gone on from the place he had reached in her dream! Already she had taken him past the need of words. But he was himself, so much less real to her than her idea of him.

"It certainly is a beautiful day! I'm looking forward to our game of tennis very much."

"*Very much*"*!* Oh, oh, how tepid! And yet there was nothing tepid in the way he was looking at her. Wings fluttered in her breast, and her voice changed from company voice to a light shaken chime of bells, the secret of life escaped through it, though the words it was crying were only:

"Oh, for *me?* Oh, you shouldn't have—chocolates!"

"And bonbons," he pointed out.

Victor and Daisy played against May and Mr. Robinson. May felt like a soap-bubble, bounding, gleaming, bright color swirling into bright color. Mr. Robinson couldn't take his eyes off her, he never even looked at Daisy, except abstractedly, as if she were a cow or a tree. His faithful dog eyes followed May, you could almost see a loving tail wagging.

"Stay to supper," Maggie invited him and Daisy.

She didn't want Daisy, but she couldn't ask one and not the other.

"Oh, my dear! Rapture and bliss *if* there was any way of letting my old Sambo know—he's feeling kind of mean, and most likely he's in bed and asleep; still, I guess I ought to send word. Our telephone would certainly be a lot more useful if any other of the folks out here had one."

"I'll go over on my bicycle," suggested Mr. Robinson in his deep serious voice, "And tell Mother on the way that I won't be home either."

"Oh, *would* you? Angel of light *and* mercy! I'll love you for life!"

"There's a moon tonight," said Mr. Robinson in a voice vibrating with meaning. He only meant May to hear, but Daisy heard too, and burst into screams of laughter as he pedalled out of the drive, ringing his bicycle bell to the empty road.

" 'There's a moon tonight,' " she mimicked, deep in her throat. "*Ow!* I shall die! May, he's going to propose! Wouldn't you *know* he's the kind of fellow wouldn't think a proposal was legal unless it was by moonlight?"

"Oh, don't——!" cried Maggie.

"*Ow! Ow!* My side! Where did he get that hat?"

" 'Where did you get that hat?' " sang Victor, and he picked up a little white paper bonbon case from Mr. Robinson's box, put it on his head, seized Lily's palm

leaf fan, and gave an imitation of him playing tennis that made them laugh until they cried.

"Oh! Oh!" May was nearly sobbing. "Did you ever see anything so much too small as it was, and so white, and so *new!* If it hadn't been so *new!* But it might just as well have had 'Bought for the occasion' printed all over it in large black letters—oh! I shall never be able to keep a straight face when I look at him again——"

And she laughed and laughed, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, until she was almost screaming—faint, sobbing screams, like something dying.

The moon turned the river to silver silk and showed frills of white flowers edging the garden paths. The air was drenched with moonlight and fragrance. And all evening May kept close to Victor and Daisy in the garden, though they certainly didn't want her. But she wasn't going to be left alone with that silly, solemn thing——

Maggie could stop worrying about Daisy, for she had gone away—gone away forever. Cousin Sam doubled up groaning one day on his old leather sofa, said to her, trying to smile, "Don't you worry, honey," and died. And Daisy cried as if her heart were broken, and, covered with crêpe, yards and yards and yards of crêpe, went back to New York as fast as she could go,

hardly stopping long enough to say goodbye, even to Victor. Meadowbrook was sold to strangers now.

A year later they saw her picture in "Types of Fair Women" in Munsey's Magazine, and learned that she had married again. His sisters were afraid Victor would mind, and tried to break it to him gently, but he had heard it already and didn't seem to mind at all.

"Well, *that's* a relief!" thought Maggie, and yet—how could he be so cheerful, when he had seemed really to love Daisy? "Victor's unselfish," she told herself. "When he's unhappy he keeps it to himself."

For a few hours they were excited—but God performed again his miracle of changing the water into wine, as the summer rains were bottled in the purple and pale-green globes of the grapes; the frost killed Maggie's dahlias; Lily scalded her hand; the organ-grinder came, playing his hollow plaintive tune and jerking his monkey on its chain—there were other things to think of happening all the time. They seemed so important—and then they were over, and no one remembered them at all.

For the second time the thunder of war came to the Campions—more distant now, in Cuba. War with Spain was declared at the end of April—too beautiful a time for people to be fighting, Maggie thought, pulling down an apple-tree branch and snuffing at the red buds and rose and silver blossoms. Still, one must remember the "Maine." Victor was always singing about it.

"'Spain, Spain, Spain,
Why aren't you ashamed?
Why, why, why,
For blowing up the Maine?
One, two, three,
And Cuba will go free,
There'll be a hot time
In the old town
Tonight!'"

How terrible it must be there for our poor soldiers. The sisters, looking through the dim windows of the newspapers, saw palm trees against quivering blue, and small lizards with flickering tongues darting across earth cracked open with the heat, across men who lay too still to frighten them. And men were dying of thirst and fever—that was worse than having a bullet sing home to your heart. It seemed cruel to sit on the shady porch, drinking cold water, throwing what was left over the rail onto the lily-of-the-valley bed. And yet it was so hard to realize. It was as if the newspapers had made up a series of exciting stories.

"Isn't it *dreadful?*" the Campions would say solemnly, reading, and then, kindling, "Well for pit-ty's *sake*—Raymond Line's going to marry that Dawson girl with the funny nose!" Or Mrs. Kelsey was advertising for a cook, or, most exciting of all, Victor's name appeared. "Look, May! Look, Maggie! Here's Victor in *again!* 'Mr. and Mrs. Edgar H. Snare entertained a merry party of young people in

honor of their daughter Miss Lola at a picnic supper on the banks of the beautiful Brandywine, those enjoying their hospitality including' —mm—mm—here—'Mr. V. Champion'—*Champion!* How idiotic! Wouldn't you think they'd know by *this* time? They've had him in often enough. Where are the scissors? I want to cut it out for him."

Yes, it was hard really to feel that a war was going on, although old ladies named their canaries "Dewey," men cheerfully whistled "Goodbye, Dolly, I must leave you," and "Just as the sun went down," and little boys turned their hats up in front and were Rough Riders, shouting "Giddap!" to their bicycles, and hissing beds of red and yellow cannas because they were Spain's colors.

"Did you ever know May had a friend named Allen Jermayne?" Lily asked Maggie.

"No, I never heard of him."

"She says he's fighting, he's a captain, a West Point man. She says she hasn't any photograph of him, that he never would have one taken, but she has a drawing of a Gibson man she says is the image of him. She acts awfully funny about it. I haven't seen any letters from Cuba, have you? But she showed me a whole pile tied up with blue ribbon, and I could just see 'My loveliest' something or other before she pulled them away. And she showed me some flowers he sent her from San Juan Hill—she said they were tropical flowers."

"What like?"

"Sort of like pressed poppies."

"Well, she's been tearing up for the mail every day—we wouldn't have seen them. Oh, Lily, I do wish—Allen Jermayne! A. J.! I do believe that's the man she danced with all evening that time she had such fun in Wilmington, ages and ages ago. I *think* it was A. J."

"I'm going to be married as soon as the war is over," May told them one day. "I'm going to marry Captain Allen Jermayne." And Maggie, feeling as if a fist had crashed between her eyes, knew that May was lying even before she turned scarlet and burst into tears.

Even Lily didn't believe it. And May only pretended half-heartedly. She told them one day that Captain Jermayne had been killed, and she wore a black dress and let the others go for the mail once more. After that none of them ever spoke of it again.

Chapter Twenty-six

"I SUPPOSE it's a sign a body's getting old when time goes by so fast," Maggie thought, putting "Victor—Many Happy Returns" and a border of scallops and dots in pink icing on Victor's birthday cake. Forty-two candles—no, she wouldn't, she'd put on four, one for each of them to blow out and make a wish on.

Poor Aunt Priscilla had died, and people from Marcus Hook had bought Riverview, nice people, no doubt, but not Church people, and *she* looked—well, plain, to say the least. But they had lots of money. May and Lily, who called, reported emperors' heads on bronze placques, hung against grape-arbor paper, washbowls of Tiffany glass edged with wrought-iron lace, suspended by heavy chains, and holding electric lights, Turkish tabourets inlaid with mother-of-pearl, cushions (so fat and firm that they left little room in the chairs) covered with tapestry squares of gaming cavaliers and drinking monks, and a deerskin with the antlers left on hanging over the landing railing. And Mrs. Detweiler had played her phonograph to them—that was wonderful. What an age they were living in—really, it seemed as if there was nothing left to be invented. Think of the moving pictures

that Victor had told them about—"The Tailor's Dream," with scissors cutting out clothes by themselves, and trousers running away, "Expert Bag Punching," "Alaska Dog Teams at Dawson City," "Winter Sports in Norway," "Levi and Cohen, the Irish Comedians" (that had bothered Lily until Victor explained it was a joke). How the sisters wished they could see them! But, of course, ladies couldn't; it wouldn't have been the thing at all to go into one of those dark mysterious places, although Maggie said she was just going to put on a thick veil and go, some day. And now here they sat and listened to Sousa's band playing "Stars and Stripes Forever," to someone singing a comic song about a Tattooed Man——

> " 'It is perfectly true you can beat a tattoo,
> But you can't beat the tattooed man——' "

and to an Uncle Josh Whitcomb monologue that they couldn't understand very well. Still, it seemed as if Uncle Josh must really and truly have his mouth at the other end of that big tin morning-glory. Mrs. Detweiler laughed so hard that little bright tears stood on her bulges of cheek, and her diamond ear-drops quivered.

"Papa and the boys certainly do delight in our talking machine! I wish you ladies could hear our Le Moyne give an imitation of it—he holds his nose like this—see? Like this. Laugh! We nearly die!"

And when they started to go she stopped them with

a mysterious wink, flung herself back in her rocking chair, and yelled over her shoulder:

"Clarence! Cla-a-a-*runts!* (He's our colored waiter-man.) Bring some cup—there's some in the ice-box, and say! Clarence! Some pretzels—you ladies like pretzels?"

In came a tall thin cut-glass tankard full of pieces of banana and pineapple, with claret lemonade filling the cracks, and a mountain of pretzels. She was kindness itself, but somehow they didn't go again, although Victor went once for ping-pong and a chafing dish supper and once to a box-party they gave in Philadelphia, where he saw chinks of "Everyman" between the towering hats worn by the ladies. Mrs. Detweiler nearly cracked her jaw yawning, but she knew it was "artistic," and genteely patted the back of her gloved wrist at the end of each act. Lily found something in a newspaper: " 'Everyman' will in a measure counteract the cheapness of those fatuous frivolities, the ultra modern musical comedies." She cut it out and pinned it to Victor's pincushion. She almost felt, hazily, dimly, that Victor was responsible for the plays he honored by attending, the books he read, the tunes he sang in the bathroom.

Victor sang "Hiawatha" and "Any Rags?", went to germans, collected steins (three—then he gave it up) read "Storiettes" in Munsey's Magazine, with heroes named Jack Meadows and heroines named Madge Van this or that, read poems about thinking you were in

love with Cora, and Dora, and Dolly, and Molly, and Bessie, and Tessie, until you met the one girl (and tried writing a few himself), made fudge in chafing-dishes and played ping-pong with young ladies with pompadours, bursts of chiffon at the backs of their necks, and straight fronts, and felt that Maude Adams would really understand him if only they could meet. His mirror was stuck full of little pencilled dance-cards, and often and often he had two invitations for the same evening. Lily put his dead carnation boutonieres in water, tried unsuccessfully to lend him her mother-of-pearl opera glasses in their blue plush case, and cut out every list that held, or should have held, his name—sometimes to her indignation he was hidden under the veil of "and others." "Everybody asks Victor everywhere!" she exulted, and May replied, "Of course! He's a bachelor. Wait till he gets married and see if he stays so popular."

Lily ate fudge, read "Richard Carvel" and "My Lady Peggy Comes To Town," wishing that she had lived in the time of brocade and powdered hair, saw "If I Were King" and fell mildly in love with Mr. Sothern in an ermine toque, fell mildly in love with Gibson men, Christy men, and C. Allen Gilbert men, made bead chains and got her threads in terrible knots, and took up pyrography, burning crooked fleurs-de-lis and *Art Nouveau* water-lilies on wooden picture frames and glove boxes.

May had the straightest front and the biggest

pompadour in Brandywine Hundred, made the three of them shirtwaists that were masses of handwork and lace insertion to wear with white piqué skirts, worked at a Battenberg lace bertha for Lily, holding the square of pink muslin close to her smarting eyes—for she needed glasses dreadfully, but she wouldn't wear them, she wouldn't give in—and spent hours locked in her room, lying on her bed with her arms around her pillow, whispering——

And Maggie worked on, getting up while the east was grey to start the fire and call Victor, worked through the day worrying over May's strangeness, the way the hens weren't laying, the way Victor was beginning to get grey—Victor! Her little brother! Admiring her own cakes, adoring her flowers, feeling patronizing towards new people in church, and frightfully annoyed with occasional squatters in their pew, and fighting off, night and day, the panic that came with the thought of how poor they were.

At last it had to be faced.

"We just can't go on. We'll either have to sell the house and move into a little one, or take boarders."

"Sell *The Maples?*"

"Well, then, we'll have to take boarders."

So they put an advertisement in the paper, and were sick with terror for fear someone would answer it.

Mr. and Mrs. Hopper and Miss Hopper came first. "Oh, don't like it! Don't like it!" Maggie prayed in her heart, as she showed them Mamma's room and the

tiny room opening off it, where Victor had slept when he was a little boy.

"Ho-hum!" yawned old Mrs. Hopper. Her feet were tired, and Josie kept on asking so many questions —weren't the trains noisy, and could Papa have a glass of hot milk at bedtime, and how about the bathroom? She picked up a pink plush pin-cushion bursting out of a silver slipper, and turned it over to see if there was a sterling mark on the bottom. "Well, Mr. Hopper, you satisfied?" she asked her husband. They both of them knew it was Josie who had to be satisfied, but they liked to pretend.

And thin old-maid Miss Hopper, with her cheap little rings and bracelets and rhinestone combs, her beaver picture-hat, high on her head, and her bunchy suit covered with big fancy buttons and sandwiches of Irish lace and velvet, went on asking questions, so *tired* of taking care of these two helpless old babies, so tired of lagging while her slow old mother toiled along, wagging her broad behind from side to side, blocking up passage-ways and making audible remarks about people. "Miss Hopper is so sweet to her mother," people said, when at a touch, Miss Hopper could have burst out screaming and *shoved* Mrs. Hopper along from behind, making her fat old legs trot, could have shrieked "Oh, shut up!" instead of mouthing, "She'll hear you, Mama. I—don't—know—who—she—is——"

Mrs. Mittendorf came next, because she was a

friend of Mrs. Hopper's. Just before supper, the two would put small knitted shawls around their shoulders and take little walks around the porch, their broad seats swaying, Mrs. Mittendorf calling "Hay foot! Straw foot!" Mrs. Mittendorf hadn't been there a week before she spilled a whole bottle of essence of peppermint on the nice new mattress.

Mr. Neff had the old school-room. Maggie got it ready for him with a sword turning in her heart. And after him came Miss Snaith, so quickly that Miss Hopper was sure she had followed him.

Victor was hardly ever at home in the evening any more. He couldn't stand the boarders all over the house.

"I can't ever get into the bathroom," he complained to Maggie.

"I know—it's Miss Snaith. She takes *hours* in there; I believe she washes out her underclothes on the sly. And then, of course, the others complain about there not being any hot water."

"Well, I'd like sometimes to be able to get to my room without running into a scuttling female in bedroom slippers and curl papers."

"They're getting ready to dazzle you and Mr. Neff, steaming their faces under towels and smoking up the lamps with their old curling irons."

"That double-distilled ass! Why are they so excited about him? He looks like something left over

from a straw-ride—and sticking out his chest as if he owned the house. It doesn't seem like home any more."

"It's hard on you. I wish we didn't have to."

"Well, it's harder on you," Victor said, and suddenly hit her cheek with his lips, quickly and shyly, and ran upstairs. Her nose tingled, tears came to her eyes. "Old foolish!" she told herself severely with a loud sniff, and hid away the moment with all the other times of especial loving kindness between herself and Victor—moments to wrap in tissue of gold and hide in her heart forever.

"Ain't it cold?" complained old Mrs. Hopper. "I hope I haven't caught a cold; these ceilings are so high seems as if the heat all went up to the top, and I believe I had a draught on my back at dinner. I guess maybe I better take some camphor, I don't want to get a cold——"

The cracked, feeble, old voice droned on.

Mrs. Mittendorf patted an enormous yawn. "Pardon *me*—I have the gapes!" She billowed in the most comfortable chair, nearest the fire, her pink chins scalloped down to her great curve of bosom, her fat fingers, bulging from her dirty diamond rings, spread themselves tenderly, lovingly on the curve of her stomach. "Keep your stomach warm and you'll be all right," she advised. "I'm a great believer in taking care of the stomach—that's the important thing. Be

good to your stomach if you want your stomach to be good to you."

The Stomach. She sat there like some idol made of great globes of pink crystal and ebony, holding tenderly that thing that was before men were, that insatiable thing that men work all their lives to satisfy. Bring offerings of red meat, silver fish, sheaves of wheat, tear the grapes from the vines; hurry, hurry, or the Stomach will curl its lash of hunger around the bodies of its slaves.

Miss Snaith didn't think all this talk about tummies was very delicate, with gentlemen in the room. She was sitting on the floor, showing her Teddy bear pictures in the fire, talking through it to Mr. Neff.

"See the pixtures in the fire, Teddy? See the little fire fairies? It just seems as if they were dancing, don't it? Yes, *Teddy* sees them! Teddy says they look like they had blue and yellow skirts all going fluttery."

"A very pretty little fancy," said Mr. Neff kindly, rousing Mrs. Hopper to call to her daughter:

"Ain't you going to give us some music this evening, Josie?"

Miss Snaith might be full of her fancies, but she couldn't play the piano.

"Everybody come and sing—what shall it be? 'Just Kiss Yourself Goodbye' or 'The Message of the Violet?' Come and sing, Mr. Neff, we can't get along without *you*."

"Hem! Hem! I seem to have a frog in my throat."

"Teddy says he's goin' to sing too, so he is!" called Miss Snaith, scrambling up. *Oop!* There went some gathers! Miss Hopper took off her rings—the one like a little piece of currant jelly, the four diamond chips in a row, and the turquoise forget-me-not, and put them in the swinging candle holder. And soon they were singing:

> " 'Any rags, any bones, any bottles today,
> It's the same old story in the same old way——' "

Mr. Neff was perfectly killing when he sang "Any Ra-a-ags!" working Teddy's little paw up and down as if he were an opera singer. The ladies were in raptures. Mr. Hopper tapped time to the music with a thick-soled, carefully polished old boot, Mrs. Hopper yawned and applauded, and Mrs. Mittendorf sat smiling sleepily into the fire, too comfortable to move, holding her darling stomach.

Chapter Twenty-seven

SUMMER came, and Miss Snaith and Miss Hopper, in piqué skirts, with chatelaine bags hanging from their straining belts, and lingerie waists with high boned collars, whose bones left cruel red marks on their necks, pretended to gather snowballs, while Mr. Neff took their photographs.

"Mercy, don't take me, I'd spoil the picture! Really, I take an awful photograph," Miss Hopper exclaimed, and Miss Snaith said, "I'd break the camera!" And then Miss Hopper, who had been looking at a snowball just above her head with a soulful expression, came to with a start, crying, "Oh, did you *take* it? Oh, I had no idea you were *taking* it!" They could hardly wait until Mr. Neff brought home the prints. Gracious, how dark they were! Miss Snaith could have cried, she looked so like a colored woman with a little white marble for a nose. "Oh, that's very pretty!" Miss Hopper assured her. "I don't think I'd know it was you, but it's very pretty. I think they're splendid, Mr. Neff, especially as my face hardly shows—that's a *great* advantage!"

Miss Hopper had a Teddy bear too. Hers had a blue ribbon, and Miss Snaith's a pink, so they wouldn't get mixed. "Theodore bears," Mr. Neff called them

in his funny way; and through them, through loving speeches and caresses lavished on them, each tragic virgin called to him, "Help me! Help me, before it is too late!"

They had given up trying to call to that stand-offish Mr. Campion, although Miss Snaith's heart fluttered whenever she saw him—just to pass the door of his empty room gave her a queer little pang, half pain, half pleasure. "He said he was fond of pink," she thought, hooking herself into her old rose pongee princess dress. "He said he liked womenly women, just after I said I hoped women would never have to vote—I wonder if he meant anything——"

The leaves turned red; the snow fell. And in the spring Mr. Neff left.

"It's Miss May," he explained to Mrs. Mittendorf. "I don't know what's the matter with her, she just sort of smoulders all the time, and some days she won't even answer when you speak to her. I wouldn't mind that, if her highness don't want to talk to me, all right, she needn't, *I'm* satisfied; but it's the way she cries at night, her room's next to mine, and I can't get my sleep —I just can't stand it."

"She's a funny one," agreed Mrs. Mittendorf, rocking back and forth, her hands crossed over her belt.

"She has bats in her belfry, that's what's wrong with her," said Mr. Neff darkly.

Bats in her belfry! What would Mr. Neff say

next! Mrs. Mittendorf swayed backward and forward, shaking with silent laughter. Bats in her belfry!

Summer again, and boiled cherry puddings. "Dr. Mittendorf was always the greatest one for boiled cherry pudding," said Mrs. Mittendorf, really thinking of her dead husband for the first time in ever so long. "When cherries were in market, I'd only have to say to Doctor, 'Well, Doctor, what would you like for dinner?' 'Boiled cherry pudding!' " Her little eyes swam, partly from sentiment, partly because the steaming purple-stained dough was so hot.

The mosquitoes were dreadful. Mrs. Hopper used up bottles of citronella. And it was so hot. The boarders rocked on the river porch, slapping and flapping their palm-leaf fans. Muggy, that's what it was. The Hoppers decided they needed a change of air—they would try Asbury Park for a while.

But the real reason was that May made them nervous. "I don't see how you stand it, Ethel," Miss Hopper said to Miss Snaith. They had grown quite fond of each other since Mr. Neff had gone. "She's got a look in her eyes that sends the cold chills up my spine."

Mrs. Mittendorf followed them. "I hate to go in a way," she told Miss Snaith. "Miss Campion sets a lovely table, and there aren't many places give you eggs, too, mornings you have scrapple. And I have to have plenty of good wholesome food, I'm stout, but I'm not strong. I haven't any fault to find with Miss

Campion, though she is outspoken, nor Miss Lily either, though she's rather selfish for all she's so religious—deceitful, too. For instance, last Sunday I was just going to slip up to my room with the Sunday papers, just to glance through them, and I looked all round the parlor—no papers! And there sat Miss Lily, as innocent as you please, reading 'The Spirit of Missions.' So I said, 'Pardon *me*, but have you seen the Sunday papers?' and she sat there looking around and said 'I don't see them.' No, and do you know *why* she didn't see them? She was sitting on them! I saw a corner sticking out—*I* gave her a look! Still, that isn't why I'm going, Miss Snaith, I haven't any complaints to make about the house, though I never *was* in a place it was so hard to get hot water; but naming no names, there's some one here that ought to be put away, and my nerves won't stand it!"

And at last only Miss Snaith was left, poor Miss Snaith and her Theodore bear.

May was in the garden, cutting the big solid mauve-pink roses, dew-cool and sweet. She felt happy and young, she whistled to herself. He certainly wasn't an ordinary plumber, anyone could see that. So handsome, with those thick lashes, curling back from bright blue eyes, those strong brown hands—— And the way he looked at her, the way he blushed when she spoke to him—*oh!*

The trouble was, he probably thought of her as a sort of Madonna, so high above him. There ought to be some way of letting people know. Perhaps when he came this morning she could drop a rose at his feet while she was saying goodmorning—everyone knew a rose meant love.

"*What became of May Campion?*"

"*Didn't you hear? She eloped with a plumber!*"

"*Good heavens! A daughter of that proud old family!*"

"*And the strange thing is, she is radiantly happy—I have never seen her look so beautiful. He is utterly mad about her, everybody says.*"

A bee circled buzzing about a rose, and lighted on it, clinging, burrowing into it, pushing deep into its sweetness; and May, watching it, felt the blood leap to her face, began to tremble.

"Isn't the plumber coming today?" she asked Maggie casually as she put her flowers in water.

"He's been and gone. He's finished the job—isn't that nice? I was afraid he'd have to come two or three times again."

"He's *through?*"

"Yes—May, what's the matter? *May!*"

"I don't mind for myself," May said through strangled sobs. "But he'll be so disappointed!" And then she began to scream; "You did it! You did it! You sent him away because you were jealous!"

"*May!*"

"You always have been of everyone who was ever in love with me! You stole Edward from me—you did, you did! He came to see *me*, and you stole him, but you couldn't keep him! Well, I hope you're satisfied, you and Victor——"

"Victor never harmed you or anyone in all his life."

"Didn't he? Didn't he? He kept me from marrying Wadsworth Robinson. Oh, yes, he did; if it hadn't been for Victor I'd have been happily married today—Wadsworth loved me, and I'd have been happy with him, if Victor hadn't shown me how silly he was, laughing and making fun of him. And he kept Mamma from marrying Mr. Lacey, he kept you from marrying Edward—he's done nothing *but* harm, all his life."

She pressed her shaking hands against her mouth, she looked at Maggie with desperate, wet, red eyes.

"Oh, Maggie, I'm so unhappy—I wish I could die——"

Miss Snaith couldn't decide whether or not to send Mr. Campion a valentine. Would he think it was funny of her? Of course, he might not guess who it came from—but in that case there wouldn't be much point in sending it.

There were some very pretty ones at Butler's. "The is red, the blue"—what did that mean? It didn't make sense. Oh, yes, there were pictures of a rose and

a violet, instead of the words. That was dainty! Quaint, too, once you caught on. And this red heart, with the border of forget-me-nots——

A Teddy bear! What next! A Teddy bear looking through a hole in a pink heart, and a little verse:

> "Please *bear* in mind, I hope you do,
> A tender heart that beats for you."

Just the thing! She would pretend it was from Theodore bear.

She could hardly wait for Jake to bring the mail on St. Valentine's Day. There it was, her envelope with its printed address! She'd have fun watching him when he opened it—but she *knew* she would blush. Another envelope for him, that looked like a wedding invitation, a postcard from Miss Lily—just a guild-meeting—an envelope that looked like a valentine for Miss May, and a florist's square box—violets, if Miss Snaith wasn't mistaken. Now who could be sending violets? Nothing for herself.

"Saint Valentine's been good to you, Miss May."

"A valentine?"

"Yes, you and Mr. Campion seem to be the only ones favored."

"Who's been sending me a valentine? Oh, and *violets!* Oh, Miss Snaith, *smell—mm!*" She pressed the violets she had sent herself against Miss Snaith's nose.

"My, what a big bunch! Somebody must like

someone, sure 'nuff!" Miss Snaith said, sniffing enviously. She wished Miss May would open her envelope—not that she was curious, just interested. But May took it and went upstairs to her room, humming and smelling her violets.

Behind her locked door she dropped the violets on the floor and ripped open the envelope. There was a daub in red and green and yellow, a hideous sharp-nosed creature with a cat on her bony knees. "A Hopeless Old Maid," the black letters said beneath the picture.

> "'Oh, for a man' has been your prayer
> For many long and weary years,
> But all your wiles, both sly and bold,
> The males have met with heartless jeers.
> Now, surely, you must know, yourself,
> That longer hope is wholly vain,
> And that a pitiful, sour Old Maid
> The rest of life you must remain."

Miss Snaith wanted to get into the bathroom—of course! May had been in there for hours—over an hour, anyway. The water had stopped running ever so long ago, and yet every time Miss Snaith in her old rose flannelette wrapper looked out into the hall, the bathroom door was still shut.

Well, she'd just lie down on her bed and close her eyes a few minutes. They said that made one look

fresh in the evening. "I wonder what he'll say when he opens that valentine!" she thought.

She got up and had another look. The door was still shut. What smelled so good? Gingerbread baking for dessert. She hoped they'd have whipped cream with it, instead of lemon sauce—she might just say she didn't think lemon sauce agreed with her very well. Not in front of Mr. Campion, of course.

She got out her demi-trained brown skirt and her best waist of tan nun's veiling, just back from the cleaner's. Those bishop sleeves were always getting in the butter. They'd done it very nicely, but it did smell funny. Oh, dear! Perhaps if she sprinkled on a few drops of "Cashmere Bouquet"——

Which would look nicer with it, her carved sandalwood beads or the *repoussé* silver *bonbonnière* that swung to her knees on its long chain? The *bonbonnière* was heart-shaped—that would be appropriate to Saint Valentine's Day, and there were some cachous left in it that she could pass around.

She pinned a crescent of "rat" on the top of her head, and turned her hair back over it in a high, hard pompadour. Then she looked into the hall again.

"Tock, tock, tock," said the clock on the stairs. Why, she wouldn't have time to wash her hands and face for supper, not to mention washing out a few handkerchiefs and a pair of stockings or so. She tiptoed to the bathroom door and listened—not a sound! Well, she'd just say something tactful through the

keyhole. She rattled the knob a little, and called humourously: "Anybody drownded?"

Victor had stayed in town for a rehearsal at the Century Club, and was having a pleasant time with a pair of pretty Chicago ears, in Wilmington on a visit. The Maples was becoming an old plantation as it entered their sympathetic pinkness, Jake and Ida were turning into any number of old family servants, speaking in anecdotes and full of devotion for "Mr. Victor." Things grew more Southern every minute, and Mrs. Jenkins' voice shattered through an atmosphere of magnolia trees and mocking birds.

"Where's the Bachelor? Bachelor! Mr. Campion!"

"Present!"

"*Well!* I've been calling till I—Margaret! Margaret Johnson! You stay right here! We're going to run through the 'Bachelor's Revery.' Now, listen everybody, *please*, we want to go through everything the way we're going to tomorrow night—no fooling or giggling. *What*, Mr. Burnett? Yes, certainly, the firelight glow and everything——"

The firelight glowed—electric lights covered with red crêpe paper. Victor walked to the middle of the stage, watched coldly by Mrs. Jenkins. It was plain from the look in her eye that she wasn't going to like it, no matter what anyone did.

" 'Tomorrow is my wedding day,
Tonight, in the firelight's glow,
I'll sit and dream of bygone days,
And the girls I used to know.' "

"You'll have to talk louder than that."

"All right, I will tomorrow."

"Well, I hope you do," said Mrs. Jenkins dubiously. "School Girl! Please *try* to be right here for your cues, or we won't get through tonight."

Victor sank into a Morris chair before "the firelight's glow," lit his pipe, gave a great stretch, and sank into the revery, while Margaret Johnson in sunbonnet, pinafore, and curls, was hit now and then by Mr. Burnett's wavering spotlight.

"Not yet, Débutante, not yet—you must wait until School Girl's through——" and she prompted the Bachelor:

" 'And seem to see again
The little——' "

" 'The little old red schoolhouse
At the bottom of the lane.' "

"Now, Débutante——"

"Of course, I'll have a bouquet to hold tomorrow night," the Débutante explained, giving her satin girdle a good tug down in front, and patting the mass of curls that burst out from under her coiffure wreath

of cotton English daisies with cotton and rubber tubing stems. Some of them didn't feel any too secure.

"Indian Maiden!"

They only had an Indian Maiden because Gertrude Carr had the costume. That was silly for a Bachelor's Revery, Victor thought. But the Athletic Girl had lots of style, with her red flannel shirtwaist and white stock, her Tam o' Shanter and flung-back plaid golf cape.

"I thought you were going to carry a golf stick, Ada."

"I am, Mrs. Jenkins, but I can't borrow it until tomorrow."

The Summer Girl—how pretty she looked in her leghorn hat, wavy as a fluted cake-pan, trimmed with roses and set on a high bandeau. Her ingenuousness was quite a contrast to the Widow, draped in black, with her hands clasped behind her to show her fine bust and straight front.

"Bride! Bride! Where's the Bride? Where's Marguerite?"

"She isn't here yet, Mrs. Jenkins, she and Scudder Tait were coming by auto, I guess that's why they're so late."

Mrs. Jenkins folded her lips and sighed.

"Well, the ones of you that are going to be in the Gibson Tableaux needn't wait any longer, but the Sunflower Belles and Beaux might go through their cakewalk again while we're waiting for her. Please

give us 'Hello, Mah Baby,' Mr. Sargent. *Mr. Sargent!* I said 'Hello, Mah Baby'."

But at last they were through, and Victor was going home on the Darby car, that connected Wilmington with Philadelphia now, was peering through the windows into the night—here was his getting-off place.

The fields were white with snow, and snow fell cold and fresh on his face. He walked buoyantly up the lane, thinking of the way the Summer Girl had looked at him—the Widow, too, for that matter. His mouth went up a little at the corners.

Maggie heard him singing "Hello, Mah Baby" as he climbed the porch steps, and flung the door open.

"Oh, Victor, I thought you'd never come——"

"I forgot to tell you I was going to stay in for a rehearsal—what's the matter? Why are you crying?"

"May—May's drowned herself—in the bathtub——"

"Maggie—Mrs. Detweiler sent all these lilies—I wish I'd never made fun of her——"

"Bring them in, Victor. Doesn't she look sweet and young? I keep thinking of the time she was the 'Lady of Shalott'—do you remember? She had lilies then, too."

She looked from Victor's red swollen eyes to her sister's lovely tranquil face, and for a second it seemed

as if an answer to all life's questions had come to her, and gone before she could make it hers. May looked so young again, so happy. The room where she lay was in twilight, but out of doors sunlight on snow made a white flame too bright for mortal eyes.

Chapter Twenty-eight

"YES, the rooms are lovely and *big*—but so little closet space! Lovely high ceilings—they must make it a very hard house to heat, don't they? See, Homer, it would have to be painted all over—see, it's all chipping off here, it comes off wherever I touch it. See? Everywhere. Careful, dear, the stairs are rather steep."

"Here's the kitchen," said Maggie severely.

"Hmm. Nice and big, isn't it? It would take a good many steps to get around *this* kitchen, wouldn't it? Not much like the way they're building them now. No electric light, have you, or even gas? Where do you get hired girls who'll take care of lamps nowadays? Look out, Homer, the floor's uneven, don't trip."

"Here's the river porch."

"Oh, yes. I guess the view must be very pretty when there isn't quite such a glare."

"Now I'll show you the garden."

"Want to see the garden, Homer? We might as well. What do you call those pink and awrnge flowers? Oh, yes, snapdragons! Remember the *beautiful* snapdragons we saw at Mrs. Proudie's, dear? They were simply *enormous!* Oh, yes, there's

your little pool. Have you ever seen Mr. Beswick's water garden, over near Kennett Square? Fountains and everything, and the gold-fish in it are *this* big!"

And then she was saying, "Well, thank you, I'm afraid it's a little *big*, but we'll let you know if we—ah——" They were buttoning up their linen dust coats, he was pulling on his gauntlets and settling his goggles and she was tying yards and yards of chiffon veil over her visored cap, and their Royal Tourist was coughing and jerking out of the drive.

"Such people!" said Maggie. She felt faint with the torture of showing the place to so many, listening to their criticisms, torn between the hope of her mind that it would be bought and the hope of her heart that it wouldn't.

And then it was sold. The Maples sold! The rich Bayard Spears bought the place. "Of course, you must consider your lovely, lovely garden just as much yours as ever," Violet Spear told the Campions.

Maggie and Lily were clearing out the box-room, getting ready to move.

"What are those big things done up in newspaper? Our old bustles! I guess no one will want *them* again. Here's Cousin Jennie Blodgett's 'God Bless Our Home' motto that Victor spoiled when she was making it here—don't you recollect; he was just a little fellow, and he fell off the footboard of the bed into her lap? She cried, and we were so scared—see, it's all broken—why do you suppose we've kept it so

long? Look, Lily, these old hats! Did you ever see anything so ridiculous, and yet we thought they were lovely—look at this one the size of a butterplate trimmed with a wreath of white clover and a seagull —and yet May looked as pretty as a picture in it! And look at this teeny, weeny muff—it looks like a mouse's muff—and it's *full* of moths—I guess we'd better throw them all away——"

"Shall we keep this lampshade pattern, Maggie?"

"That isn't a lampshade, that's Miss Snaith's pattern for circular drawers."

"Oh, is it? I guess that's why I had such a hard time making that yellow lampshade from it. Here's Victor's old silver mug—how did that get up here? And Mamma's Wardian case——"

"The Wardian case! Remember how we used to get ferns in the woods for it? And the woods are all cut down and built over now."

"Look, Maggie, Mamma's beadwork! Recollect how we would string the beads for her? And she let us have enough for necklaces for all the dolls—oh, dear, of course, I had to spill them!"

Mothballs rattled to the floor and rolled into corners with the rolling beads, as Maggie pulled out Grandfather's old shawl. And here were rolls of wall paper, Mamma's moss rosebuds, the buff lozenges of the bedroom they had slept in as little girls, a diamond pattern of crossed mauve ribbons that Maggie just re-

membered in the parlor. Here was a box full of crêpe veils, calling up visions of sadness.

"*Oh*——"

"What is it?"

"It's Victor's old autograph album—look, don't you remember, May copied that dove with the banner in its mouth for him. 'Please do not tear out any leaves. Victor Campion. The Maples,' 'Remember our school days at Rugby. Very truly, Your friend, J. W Harris.' Who was he, one of the teachers?"

"No, he was a little boy who came out for over Sunday once, don't you remember, he and Victor got a bag of black walnuts and got walnut stain over everything? And he was homesick and cried after they went to bed."

" 'Tell me not in mournful numbers
Flirting is an empty theme,
For all *school boys* have their pleasures
When the *girls* upon them beam.
Your friend, Emmie Holly.
Did you have a nice time hunting the pump that night?'

"Well, for pity's sake! Emmie Holly!"

"Oh, Maggie——"

"What?"

"Here's Edward—'Ever your friend, Edward Post.'"

"I didn't know Victor had this book so long ago."

"Here's poor Aunt Priscilla—'The night is' something—a big blot—'that never finds a day.'"

"'In sailing down the stream of life
In your little canoe
May you have a pleasant voyage
And room enough for two.
Your friend, Bessie Schmalsweiden.'

"Bessie Schmalsweiden! What a name! Who's *she?* I never heard of her in my *life!* Here's another:

"'You may dream of poetical fame
But your wishes may chance to miscarry,
The best way of sending one's name,
To posterity, Victor, is to marry.
M. C.'

"Who's M. C.? Lily!

"'*Remembrance* is all I ask,
And if remembrance prove a task
Forget me!
You true friend, Lucy Hawthorn.'"

"Here's another book—shall I give it to Jake for the children?"

"Look and see if there isn't a picture of a little girl, carrying her baby brother across stepping stones over a brook and trying to hold on to a bunch of wild flowers—yes, there it is! Why did that picture

always make me feel so happy? We better keep all these old songs of Mamma's."

She turned over the yellow sheets of music. "All That's Bright Must Fade." "Where Is My Lover?" "Withered Geranium."

> " 'Home of youth! all thy pleasures
> Are impressed on my heart——
> Ere they fade from my mem'ry
> Life itself must depart——' "

" 'S Maggie! 'S Maggie!"

"I told Lossie to yell up when it was lunch time, but it *can't* be yet. What is it, Lossie?"

"Dey aint nothin' fo' lunch, scusin' some pohk chops Ah give Jake."

"I guess fried tomatoes 'll have to do. I'll run out and get some, and you be looking through this trimming box, Lily—there's a lot that's not worth moving that Lossie'd love to have—those jet buckles are kind of pretty, though."

Coming in from the truck patch with the tomatoes, she saw a butterfly that had lighted on the bricks by the kitchen steps and was slowly opening and closing its quivering wings, blue in the sunshine, black in shadow. She stood gazing at it, lost.

"*Goodness!* I haven't any time to stand looking at butterflies!"

But what did it make her think of? What was it? And then she was back through the years, back under

the pear tree with Edward, watching another butterfly. The tomatoes fell to the ground and burst.

After all it was a relief when they were finally in the new house. It was a plain little place, and they couldn't see the river; but there was a sunny bay-window for Maggie's geraniums, and the card dish was full of calling-cards, with the grandest surreptitiously put on top by Lily. And just having a clean empty kitchen to go into was luxury. To know there wouldn't be a slimy mass of tea-leaves and orange seeds and bits of string to be picked out of the sink drain, or a tipped-over bottle of sticky black "tonic" oozing among the tea-towels: to be able to relax from the mental pushing and shoving at the dark sisters of that long procession that strolled through the kitchen of The Maples while the Campions were keeping boarders.

The Maples was being remodelled. Maggie never went on that bit of road, but people told her about it.

It wouldn't have been as hard if the Spears hadn't been making the place so much more beautiful. The new walled garden; the long-spurred columbine from England; the tea-roses with their melting colors of sunsets and peaches and cream; the little lead boys holding a sun-dial on their heads, far older than the great trees that feathered the sky above the house;

Mrs. Spear's tool-house like a little stone house in the woods in a German fairy tale, with all the tools Maggie had always wanted, with their handles painted moss-green, and the shelter-seat under the pear trees, whose petals fell on butler and footman spreading the lace cloth, bringing out silver tea-things and plates of paper-thin bread and butter or hot crumpets melting with butter and tenderness. It would have been easier to bear, if the Spears had gone in for peanut brittle stone walls and round beds of cannas, like Mrs. Detweiler.

Mrs. Spear was always sweet about giving the Campions the credit when people praised her garden, but to her friends she said:

"Well, of course, my dear, it *was* a *sweet* old place; but really and truly, the *condition* it was in—! Did you ever *see* it before we bought it?"

No matter what changes they made, Maggie thought, she could keep The Maples unchanged in her heart. When her home had been hers, she had never been able to hold it—the leaves fell, sunsets faded, darkness drank up the river, everything changed and passed like flowing water. But now that she had lost it it was hers forever, immortal.

Lily wanted dreadfully to go to the housewarming the Spears gave, when all the changes had been made. "It would hurt their feelings so if none of us came," she thought. And she did want to see what they had done to the house, and then there were sure to be

wonderful refreshments. Of course, *if* she went she wouldn't mention it to Maggie, who would rather die than go, she knew, and who couldn't stand the Spears just because they had bought The Maples.

"*If* I go—" Lily said to herself, up to the time when she put on her hat and her new dotted veil—goodness, how stiff and scratchy! And then with her heart thumping she crept downstairs and out of doors, while Maggie, with her head tied up in a dustcloth and her mouth full of tacks, was covering the old schoolroom sofa with a pair of the parlor curtains, too busy to notice what anyone else was doing.

They had taken away the fountain with its iron calla-lilies—how queer! All it needed was a little paint, and one broken lily fixed. But there was another fountain, a new one, in the garden, white against the hemlock hedge, a slender column splintering into rainbows, veiling itself in thin crystal.

Sunlight drenched through the trees, the red tulips were sun-filled cups—Holy Grails at a garden party. She had a new hat, bought secretly in Wilmington. "It's my own money!" she told herself, but she knew she ought to save it for the dentist. It was a sort of peach-basket, only it had grapes on it instead of peaches. She had tried on almost every hat in the shop before she found it, and her mild deliberation nearly drove the shop-girl mad. "You've got to remember you have a stout face, dear," she said, plunging hat after hat on Lily's head, bending down an

ear. "That's why you don't think they look good on you, but the hats themselves are really lovely; I wouldn't tell you so if they weren't." But Lily loved this one—white grapes that looked good enough to eat. Their light tapping cheered her now, she put up her hand from time to time to feel them. But even with the new hat, even though she had enlivened her old brown silk dress with pectoral fins of brown chiffon, and cleaned her white gloves, among the other women in their frilly flower-colored organdies and muslins, she felt like a hoptoad in a petunia bed. She almost wished she hadn't come—but the *café frappé* was delicious, and an orchestra, under a striped red and white awning over near the beech tree, was playing that lovely new waltz from "The Merry Widow" that Victor was always whistling. And then everyone was being so kind.

"Sweet of you to come," Mrs. Spear murmured, her eyes wandering absently while she clung to Lily's hand. "*Do* you like our little changes? Of course, really *you* did the whole thing—aren't the tulips heavenly, if I do say so myself? You know my little Dorothy, don't you? Just think, Dotty, Miss Lily used to live here when she was a little girl like you, and maybe some day she'll tell you all about what she used to do then—won't that be *exciting?*"

"Would you like to hear all about what I did when I was a little girl like you, darling?" Lily asked in a voice dripping with honey.

"No-o."

"Dorothy! If you can't speak politely to Mother's friends, you can go up to Fraulein! Now stop kicking the grass with your pretty new slippers—*Dorothy*—and take Miss Lily's hand and show her where the refreshments are, that's Mother's big girl!"

So Lily had some more *café frappé*. And while she was eating it she gave such a jump that she spilled a spoonful down her front. There was Victor! She was pretty sure he didn't want her to see him; she knew she didn't want him to see her. And it made her sad to see him there, a guest in the home that should have been his own.

She puffed off to the house as fast as she could go. People were swarming like bees in a hive. "Just poke around," urged Mrs. Spear, hurrying past. "See what we've done upstairs——"

She didn't want to look into the bathroom, but something pushed her, pulled her. How changed—it was a blue and silver fairy tale of a bathroom now! The crackling copper-lined tub was gone, and a white porcelain one was in its place. And here was the room where she and Maggie and May used to sleep when they were small. The place where Victor did the decalcomania goose, upside down to make it funnier, all the dark brown wood, was painted over, the walls and soft chairs were pink, the bed and dressing table were all pink ruffles. She was like a bee in the heart of a rose. How changed——

The white fur rugs, the pink walls, blurred and faded. Three little girls in round combs and striped stockings played together in the pool of yellow sunlight on the floor. Her mouth jerked, she fumbled for her handkerchief, but they did not look at her as she stood in the doorway.

Chapter Twenty-nine

FANNIE PAGE tilted the side of her face to her husband's casual kiss, as she went on reading her letters. "Frances says little Francie's been chosen to be Wild Rose in the school play," she told him across his fence of newspaper. "She's making her a costume of pink and green crêpe paper—seems to me *studying's* the last thing they think of in school nowadays. Elizabeth says as far as she can see the twins never do anything but model in clay and sing folk-songs. Let's see. Both Freddie's front teeth are out. Poor little fellow, how funny he must look! What's the matter with your canteloupe, dear? Isn't it good? I *told* that man——"

"Where's Pren?"

"He had breakfast earlier. He's going to Springfield with the Bangs boys, I only hope they don't break down and have to be towed home again. I told him I'd tell you he'd taken the automobile, I knew you wouldn't mind."

"Well, I do mind."

"No, you don't." She heaved her violet billows out of her chair, and came around to kiss the bald place on the top of his head. She must remember to

get him some more hair tonic—not that it seemed to do much good.

"Have another cup of coffee—of *course*, it won't hurt you. Mary, ask Ella for some hot waffles."

"Here's about my speech at the banquet, Fannie."

"Mmm——"

"Well, if you aren't interested——"

"What? Oh, darling, I *am*, *intensely* interested!"

"What in?" he asked suspiciously.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Prentice, I wasn't listening, I was reading a letter from Margery, and *guess* who she's met! Victor Campion! Did you ever? Listen——

'Betty and I went to a dinner before a dance at the Century Club, I wore my candleshade——' "

"Her what?"

"Oh, her pink dress with the crystal fringe—let's see—'and split the skirt again——'

"*Tc!* Why *will* they try to dance in hobble skirts? Wait, where is it that she tells about Victor?

" 'I had something aged but sprightly on one side of me, named Mr. Victor Campion. When I say sprightly, I mean he's the kind that's still begging for a rosebud; and one of the other men told me at the dance that after dinner he told them the world's mildest limerick about a split skirt that he evidently considered absolutely devilish. He was pretty old for the party, but Betty says everybody uses him for filling in, though the débutantes groan when they get

next him; and, of course, he's *not* exactly thrilling. She says he's a regular town institution, you haven't properly come out until Mr. Campion comes to your tea and says 'What charming blossoms and what still more charming buds!' You'll see he really *is* old when I tell you he says he knew you when you were a girl— *Well!*"

"A polite daughter you have!"

"Now, Prentice, of course, we seem a thousand to those young things—just a lit-tle *bit* of egg on your chin, darling!

" 'He seemed inclined to give me a rush at the dance—and, oh, Mother, his idea of the Boston! Hop is no word for it! He's *much* worse than Daddy. But a perfect *peach* from Princeton who was on my other side came to my rescue——'

"Prentice, why do you suppose Victor Campion never married?"

"Oh, I don't know. He was too much of a spoiled baby, I guess, first his mother and then his sisters, always protecting him and admiring him until he was too tender to do anything but run home and hide, when anything real started to happen to him. And then he was supposed to be pretty much cut up over Lucy Hawthorn, wasn't he?"

"Yes, I guess he was; but mercy, that was ages ago, and she certainly wasn't the only pebble on the beach. And anyway, no man's going to be faithful to one woman all his life if she's out of reach—you needn't

tell me! Women do, but not men—it isn't their nature. No, I guess he just wasn't the marrying kind, or else as you say they made him too comfortable at home."

Prentice made a vague conversational sound, his eyes straying to his newspaper, but Fannie went on, interested:

"You know it isn't only Victor himself, but I believe the girls wouldn't have been old maids if it hadn't been for him. Maggie never said so, but everyone knew she broke her engagement so she could stay and take care of him; and they never could go anywhere or have pretty clothes or anything, because everything had to be spent on Victor. You can't exactly blame him for being selfish, they never gave him a chance to be anything else. Did they? Did they, Prentice?"

"Mm," said Prentice, reading.

"Mother always said Mrs. Campion would have married again if it hadn't been for Victor. I remember there was someone. Mrs. Campion came to see Mother one day, and cried and said Victor was so sensitive he needed especially tender treatment, and Father said afterwards he needed a hairbrush applied to the seat of his trousers."

"That's about right."

"Well, it seems queer to think of such a mild little man as Victor Campion having any influence on anybody. But I can't help feeling sorry for him. An old

bachelor seems so sad, somehow. Sort of forlorn. And can you imagine—even imagine life without any children, Prentice?"

"I can easily, and it sounds like a paradise of peace."

"Oh, go on! Skidoo!" she cried, slapping him affectionately.

"Fannie! What language!"

"Well, it's what Pren and Bobby say all the time—'twenty-three, skidoo.'" She returned his goodbye kiss, as she put a pansy in his buttonhole, and then went back for just one more waffle with butter and maple syrup. She knew she oughtn't to eat waffles, she was so fat. Elizabeth was always telling her so. "You mustn't let yourself go to seed, Mother." Oh, well! She poured out just a little more coffee, with three lumps and cream.

Victor Campion! Poor old thing! She was sorry for the girls, too. Isabel Leaf said they had had a dreadful time, with May's suicide, and being poor, and having to sell The Maples. The Maples without the Campions, the Campions without The Maples—impossible to imagine! "We used to have such fun there!" she thought. "Poor old Maggie! It would be nice to ask her to Hartford for a visit—give her a good rest, and feed her up." She would do it sometime—or at least she would if ever a time came when she wasn't too occupied with her family. The family came first, of course.

Poor Maggie! Poor Lily! Poor Victor! Never to marry, never to have children and grandchildren—how awful! No one to love. Perhaps, she had gone to seed, as Elizabeth said, but what did it matter, when such fresh young flowers were springing up so thickly around her?

Her thoughts floated from the Campions to little Francie in her wild rose costume—to the dress she was embroidering for Elizabeth's baby—the day's menus—Pren would be bringing the Bangs boys home for dinner—Bobby back from Andover tomorrow—the sunshine wrapping her feet in soft warm gold—the pot of pansies on the breakfast table. One was dead, and in her mind she stretched out her hand and pinched it off, but her body was too comfortable to move. She sank into an agreeable torpor.

Victor lay in his bath, dreamily blowing bubbles. Nice to sleep late and dawdle over dressing on Sunday morning. " 'Oh, waltz me around again, Willie,' " he sang, making a beautiful lather.

" 'Around, around, around!
The music so dreamy, like peaches and creamy——' "

He was going to do exercises every morning—that was the way to keep fit. Sunday was the day to be lazy, but he'd start tomorrow. Twenty minutes brisk exercises every morning—what if it did mean getting

up a little earlier? The very thought made him feel as glowing and strong-willed as if he had gone through them already.

"'Oh, Willie Fitzgibbons he used to sell ribbons,
And stand up all day on his feet——'"

Where was his blue tie with the cream-colored dots?

"'He got very spoony on Madeleine Mooney——'"

Last night he had come home old and tired. The dinner had been hard work. He had told all his funniest stories, and waited with an ear anxiously cocked for the laughter that did not come. Polite, vague smiles—"Oh, that's *perfect!*" And afterwards, at the dance! No one really danced any more.

But at home again, where all things—the burning lamp, the doughnuts and milk waiting under a napkin on the hall table, his turned-back bed, light, and food, and rest—were symbols of love for him, he revived, he grew happy again.

Maggie was watering her plants in the bay window. A rubber bulb sprinkler filled itself—blub-blub-blub—in a pail of warm water standing on the newspapers spread on the floor under the dripping fringe of ivy, and the room was full of sunshine and the fragrance of sprinkled geraniums.

"You sound as lively as a cricket. Have a good

time last night? Wait, I'll bring in your breakfast——"

She loved Sunday mornings, when she could let him sleep late, when he had time to talk with her as he lingered over his breakfast. She made him a brown and gold puff of omelet while he was eating his orange, and brought it in to him still sputtering and heaving.

"Guess who I sat next at dinner—Fannie Leaf's daughter, the youngest one. She's visiting Robert and Isabel."

"Fannie Leaf's daughter! Well, I never! What's she like?"

"A pretty little thing—looks the way Fannie used to, pink cheeks and dimples and curly light hair."

"Well, wasn't that nice for her, to sit next you and have you know her mother and father and everything —here, let me give you some more coffee. Did she give you any news of Fannie and Prentice?"

"Some new grandchildren since last we heard. A grandmother! Poor old Fannie, I bet she doesn't like that. Makes her sound pretty old, don't it?"

"It don't seem possible. I always think of her the way she was on her wedding day, so slender and laughing—the prettiest bride I ever saw, I think, and the youngest looking. But Isabel Leaf says she's aged awfully, and gotten so fat and settled—what do you want? Matches? Wait a minute, I'll get them for

you. Well, I can't get over how nice it was for her having you for a partner!"

"She's not much of a dancer, though. We didn't get on very well together."

"Well, if she couldn't dance with you, she couldn't dance with anyone."

He went happily into the living-room, to the sunshine and the Sunday papers. Last night he had been hurt by Margery Page's straying attention, vague answers, and frequent stiffenings of the jaw that meant yawns suppressed. She had had plenty to say to the Princeton sophomore on her other side, plenty of things to giggle about. And although she and Victor certainly had not gotten on very well when they were dancing together, he had seen her swooping and dipping almost professionally with other partners. But no matter what suspicion stole on him in the outside world that he was not as young as he used to be, that he was not as fascinating as he wanted to be, at home where they loved and admired him so he found the Fountain of Youth.

He hunted out the funny papers, and lit a fresh cigarette. She had been as pretty as a picture, with all those yellow curls. Perhaps, she had just been shy with an older man, "A man of the world," he thought rather complacently. He hadn't anything especial to do today—he might go in to Wilmington after lunch and call on her. It would be polite, and she would be pleased.

Chapter Thirty

WAR swept the world. "Oh, if *only* I could go over and drive an ambulance!" Maggie thought, longing to be in the thick of things, longing to fling out her life in service in the mud, under the star-shells, and having to be content with knitting socks and going without sugar. Lily couldn't manage socks, but she knitted sweaters—sweaters for giants, vast, enormous, tiny sweaters for brownies. And yet the directions were always the same—she couldn't understand why they turned out so different, or why they had so many openwork places. "More holy than righteous," said Maggie, picking up Lily's dropped stitches. Lily wanted to fasten little cheering notes to the sweaters, but she was too shy. She talked all the time about "Our Boys," and sang, with pleasurable tears in her eyes:

> " 'There's a long long trail a-winding
> To the land of my dreams,
> Where the nightingale is singing,
> And a white moon beams——' "

She thought it was the sweetest song she had ever heard. It was dashing to have Maggie say one day

"I don't think so much of that song—or maybe it's the way you're singing it?"

Victor was on committees for raising money, for giving patriotic balls, for arranging benefit performances. He had never been so important and busy in his life, and when peace came he was a pricked balloon.

Saturday Market in Wilmington! The farmers' wagons were pulled up along the curb, chickens and eggs, butter, and boxes of blackberries, and tight bunches of red and yellow flowers were spread out for sale. Women with baskets on their arms priced, bargained, tasted, stopped to gossip in midstream.

"What you asking for peaches? Kinda green, ain't they?"

"Let's try a piece of your cheese——"

Rich women, poor women, white women, black women, filling their market baskets—sea green cabbages, limp-necked poultry, a little wooden boat of cottage-cheese, a fist of yellow banana fingers, sometimes for the spirit's sake a bunch of marigolds and bee-balm, solid as worsted work.

Maggie shifted her heavy basket from arm to arm. A couple of canteloupes, and then she could go over to the library and rest until it was time to catch the car for home.

While she was pressing her thumb into the canta-

loupes and smelling them, the pain came again, so that she could hardly stand. She set her teeth, feeling the sweat spring out on her upper lip. If she could just live through this second—the next—the next——

The pain became the center of everything, gathered all creation into itself. Streets, houses, forests, seas, the sun and sky, concentrated in that one spot of torture. Then it ebbed away, left her. She managed to get her basket over to Market Street and up the long flight of library steps, she managed to change Lily's library book.

Each time she thought it wouldn't come again. But it was coming oftener, and it was worse. She faced it, sitting with her basket at her feet, turning over the pages of something—"The Musical Courier."

She was afraid to go to the doctor, that was the truth. But how silly, when probably he'd say "Don't eat tomatoes," or "Drink hot water," and she'd be all right again. She had nearly fainted on the street just now—she certainly would have to do something.

And she made up her mind to go to the doctor now, before she lost her courage. What doctor? She didn't know. They hadn't had one for so long. She would telephone Isabel Leaf and ask her who was good.

"Oh, I hope it's nothing serious!" Isabel said.

"Oh, no, nothing at all, really——"

"We always go to Dr. Henderson on Delaware

Avenue. Why don't you come out to lunch, and then I'll send you down to him in the motor?"

But now that she had made up her mind she wanted to get to the doctor's right away. It would be more restful to have some ice cream at Jones's, afterwards, all reassured and happy. She might even go on a spree and see the Charlie Chaplin movie at the Queen, if she didn't have to wait too long.

She felt so well by the time she got to Dr. Henderson's that it seemed ridiculous to go in—still, she was here, and she might as well. "I wish I'd asked Isabel what he charges," she thought, with a nervous look into her purse.

The waiting room was quite full of people—masked people, hiding from each other, covering themselves up, coughing now and then, or speaking in low voices, but so still most of the time that the clock sounded loud. Waiting patients, as much a part of the furnishing of the room as the sepia photographs of cathedrals on the walls, the aspidistra in its brass jardinière, the pile of "National Geographic Magazines" —only showing that they were real by the frightened eyes that looked out sometimes through the slits in the masks.

Maggie looked at pictures of the fishing industry of Norway. She looked at pictures of Yellowstone Park. She looked at a copy of "Life," reading the jokes without taking in a word. My, it was getting late! She glared suspiciously at newcomers—suppose

they got in ahead of her, somehow! At this rate she'd be lucky if she caught the twenty minutes to four, without stopping for anything to eat.

And then it was her turn—too soon, after all! Too soon! She picked up her market basket and went in to Dr. Henderson.

Lily had a sore throat and had spent the night with a stocking-compress around it. But she was still as hoarse as a crow in the morning, and dreadfully dejected—griddle-cakes for breakfast, and it hurt her too much to swallow them! So Maggie told her to stay home from church, and she would put the flowers on the altar.

She walked along the road to the church, the great sheaf of white cosmos jutting out at one side, wagging with every step.

She had cancer, and it was too late to operate. That was his verdict, stripped of the kindness and encouragement he had wrapped it in. Cancer—too late to operate——

What pretty single dahlias in the Worthingtons' garden—the color of raspberries and candlelight. Not much like the dahlias she used to grow at The Maples painted tin rosettes——

That meant she was dying. How queer! Maggie Campion dying! But you weren't dying when you were walking to church in your best voile dress; when

you bothered to put on your best stockings, silk to just below the knees, because it was Sunday; when you got up earlier than anyone else in the house, and started the fire and made griddle-cakes for breakfast.

Dying—dying. The word repeated itself to her, monotonous as the beat of waves.

> "Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
> Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying."

The Tennyson tableaux—so long ago. Edward in a tam-o'-shanter trimmed with his Aunt Jo's plume—May in silvery white, holding the silvery lilies—poor Aunt Priscilla's blue tail—Victor teasing May about Edward—Edward——

There went the Willie Trewhitts all packed into their new Ford coupé—not going towards church, either. She nodded severely, and Willie, who had been in her Sunday school class, reddened and looked like an embarrassed little boy in spite of being a married man and father of a family.

Communion Sunday. She went into the musty little robing-room with its piles of dusty prayer books, its framed yellowed photograph of old Mr. Page in his vestments, and got out the white hangings. The cosmos were almost lost in their feathery foliage—not that many people would be there to see them. Everybody went automobiling on Sundays nowadays, or stayed at home and read the Sunday papers.

She brushed the fallen petals into the newspaper she

had wrapped around the wet stems, pausing to read an advertisement for a marked-down sale of overcoats at Gimbels'—Victor needed an overcoat badly. She shook the petals out of the chancel window, put the folded newspaper under her pew, and knelt, thinking of nothing. Through the service she stood up, sat down, knelt, not thinking, not feeling, numb.

"Bread of the world, in mercy broken,
Wine of the soul, in mercy shed,
By whom the words of life were spoken,
And in whose death our sins are dead.

"Look on the heart by sorrow broken,
Look on the tears by sinners shed;——"

And suddenly the beating waves crashed through, drenching her with realization, with terror, submerging her. Anguish and death——

"I can't bear it! I can't bear it! I don't want to die!"

And the answer came—did her ears hear it, or her heart? She didn't know.

"This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die."

"Bread of the world, in mercy broken,
Wine of the soul——"

He had died, so that she need never die. He had promised!

"I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall

never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." The bread of the body, the wine of the soul. The wheat and grapes had had their roots in the earth, but they had grown up towards heaven. The white bread, the red wine; white as snow and red as fire—snow and fire, winter and summer, death and life, opposite and yet the same, part of eternity's circle.

But before the wheat becomes bread it must be ground, before the grapes become wine they must be crushed. They must be sacrificed, as Christ on the Cross was sacrificed.

Winter must come, and death. But the seed lives, and rises again from the dark earth, from the grave. The only way to life is through the door of death.

She knelt, hiding her streaming face in her arms, shaken by terrible weeping. Her legs were too weak to stand, but the Son of God, the Son of Man, came down to her from his altar, bringing her his divine gift of terror and beauty, his gift of sacrifice. And as she accepted his gift he entered into her, and she into him, he was everything, the bread, the wine, the sun in the sky, the dust that danced in the sunbeams, her tear-soaked handkerchief. "Lo, I am with you alway—"

Chapter Thirty-one

"*WHERE* you going, Maggie?"

Lily squatted back on her heels. A small limp pancake of home-made raffia hat, trimmed with rosettes of red raffia topped her mild apple face, every hair pin seemed about to spring from her hair, she bristled with them like a hedgehog. She was digging the holes for the new tulip bulbs—the bulbs of the red and yellow parrot tulips, all feathered and fringed, that Mrs. Detweiler had sent from her garden.

"Heigho for meddlers!"

That was all Maggie would say. Where *could* she be going, in her best voile, and with her card-case? "I think it's real mean in you not to tell me!" Lily called after her placidly.

It was quite a relief to have her go out, she had been so cross and brisk for the last week or two, cleaning the house, putting up preserves—what had gotten into her? "I think I'll go and have a little lie-down while she's gone," Lily said to herself, scrambling to her feet. She found the new "Ladies' Home Journal," tucked a lump of sugar into her cheek, and lowered herself onto the sofa. Oh, how nice to be able to rest and enjoy herself without feeling guilty, as she did

when Maggie was dragging the furniture around or struggling to cut up quinces.

Mrs. Spear was in the midst of a rubber of bridge when the maid brought in Maggie's calling card, ivory with age. "Oh, bother!" she said. "Still, I suppose I'll have to see the poor old thing." And she called to her daughter, who was sprawling on the sofa reading "Town Topics" and wishing they'd have more about Wilmington people in it, "Take my hand, Dot."

Maggie had come to say good-bye to The Maples while she could. She knew the time was growing short. The maid had prudently hooked the screen door, leaving the shabby stranger outside in case she was just trying to sell something, but it hadn't been like being locked out of her own home. Everything was so changed. The fountain gone, the peony beds gone, the grey house painted white, with awnings of orange Italian sail-cloth. "Pity's sake!" thought Maggie as she waited. "I don't think much of their wonderful improvements!" Homesick for The Maples, on hot days remembering it veiled in snow, on cold days aching for it gilded with sunshine, netted down with shadows, she had felt that she would know a leaf from home, out of all the other leaves in the world. And now here was home itself, and it was strange to her.

This Mamma's parlor? This room full of sleek rich-looking women, white terriers with green leather

collars, magazines, open candy boxes, cigarette smoke, noise——

"I know Miss Campion wants to see her garden. Miss Campion's the most *marvellous* gardener, I'm petrified to have her see all the mistakes I *know* we've made. Of course, I needn't tell *you* that at this time of the year—oh, Simpson! Turn on the fountain for Miss Campion, will you? And I wonder if you could cut us a few flowers?" She added aside, "I'm terrified of my gardener! I wouldn't dare pick a flower without his permission."

"No, no! Stop him! No, don't pick me any—I have to go. Thank you just the same. Don't come with me—I'll cut across——"

She was desperate to get away. "What's the matter with the crazy old thing?" Violet Spear wondered. Keeping away for twelve years, and then acting like this. And not a single word about all the improvements. Not much like her brother, who was almost painfully polite when he came to dine or to play bridge. But she did look sick—such a color, and so thin that her clothes hung on her as if they were hanging from the wooden shoulders of a coat-hanger. She almost asked her to stay to tea—then she thought irritably, "No, if she's so crazy to go, let her!" She was a kind woman, but her new rubber reducing corset wasn't by any means the dream of comfort she had expected, her satin slippers were soaking from the wet

grass, and she felt that little muffled beat in her temple that meant one of her bad headaches was coming.

Maggie hurried up the lawn, straining towards escape. The beech tree was the same, anyway. And as she looked at it the mist of strangeness lifted, blew away, she saw her home again. Nothing was changed, really. Nothing was lost. Childhood's sky arched up from childhood's river, exquisitely reassuring. Small, chunky sunset clouds filled the west, cobblestones from the golden streets. Red leaves fell about her in a sudden shower—the red of the wine and the blood of sacrifice. They were falling back to the earth from which they had sprung, making ready for winter's death—and yet nothing died, nothing! In the spring the buds would swell again.

"Lily!"

But Lily's light whistling snores went on peacefully, so Maggie dragged herself out of bed, and downstairs to the pantry, for some cracked ice.

They had Lossie's daughter Rose to do the cooking now that Maggie had to stay in bed. And her beau was there again—there was a light in the kitchen shining through a haze of tobacco smoke. Rose's alarm clock, waiting on a pantry chair to be taken up to bed, held up its black hands in horror at the lateness of the hour. "He ought to have gone home ever so long ago!" it said.

It was a panicky moment for the young ones. No mice were ever more still, and then—*crash!* One of the mice knocked something over with its tail. "I ought to speak to them," Maggie thought, getting her ice. But she put out the pantry light and climbed up the stairs.

The trained nurse was coming in the morning. Maggie had had to give up fighting against having her. Long before Lily was awake, she was up tidying her room, making the bed with fresh sheets, putting on her best nightgown, getting ready to be nursed. Lily had tried hard, but things were in an awful muddle. From time to time Maggie stopped, crouched in a knot of pain, her wet forehead pressed against the marble slab of the bureau. Then she straightened herself, gathered up sticky medicine spoons with her nose wrinkling in disgust, fished the wrapped circles of combings from the waste-basket, went to the linen closet for a fresh towel to cover her bedside table, before she climbed back into bed and gave herself up to the flame of anguish that was consuming her.

It was better after Miss McMurtrie came. Sometimes Maggie was given something to stop the pain, and she could smile at Lily's and Victor's scared, solemn faces that stretched into wide answering smiles when they saw she was looking at them.

"Kind of nice to lie here in a nice warm bed and not have to do anything, ain't it?" she asked them. Nice not to have the alarm clock slash across her sleep,

not to have to stagger up into the cold dark mornings, not to have to keep going when her legs felt like butter in the sun, nice to lie watching the gently falling snow. Oh, if she could only make herself believe that it was!

She wasn't afraid of dying any more, for herself, but how could she leave the children?

The love that had lighted her life shone for her as she looked back through the years—Edward—Papa—Victor. Memories came like the great silver bubbles that waver slowly up from the dark depths of a spring. Going for chestnuts with Edward when the air smelt of frost and the dead grasses were gold and silver—there was a film of ice over the fallen leaves in the shadowy places, the small green hedgehogs of burs spilled out their brown satin nuts. Everywhere was the feeling of hidden life—warm furry little bodies, bright eyes, and pattering feet. And suddenly he and she were dropping their baskets, rushing into each other's arms, not able to stay apart another instant——

Papa lifting her up to ride in front of him on his horse——

"I won't let you fall, Muggins."

"Pooh! I'm not a bit scared! I could ride Gipsy bareback, Papa! I could ride standing up, if you'd let me!"

She and the children in the spring woods, where the dogwood trees in blossom floated like wreaths of cloud. She was trying to get unsteady little Victor across the stream on the wobbly stepping stones—*splash!* In

they both went, while May and Lily screamed with excitement, and Trusty barked fit to kill himself——

And then she was holding the baby close to her heart. Mamma had given him to her wrapped in shawls. "Be careful of Baby, Maggie——"

"Miss Lily! Miss Lily!"

"She's just gone over to the store, Miss McMurtrie."

"I think you'd better come right away, Mr. Campion——"

He ran upstairs, his heart knocking against his side, and tiptoed into Maggie's room. And something tore him, made him fling himself down by her bed, crying, "Maggie, don't die! Don't die!" But for the first time in his life she did not answer him.

Chapter Thirty-two

LILY loved the Sunday papers. Lying on the sofa covered like an elderly Babe in the Wood with papers instead of leaves, she read every word about Queen Mary's toques and Princess Mary Viscountess Lascelle's baby, how to arrange salad in green pepper canoes, whether skirts were going to be long or short, and what "Doug and Mary" were doing at the moment. She read selected poems, and often cut them out raggedly with a hair pin and lost them down the crack of the sofa. She looked at the funny pictures and made baffled tries at the puzzles, like a moth bumping softly against a window pane. She read anything about Harvard, in the sports section, on account of Papa and Victor, and looked at pictures of football heroes, thinking how their mothers must worry. She read special articles about chorus girls winning the mystic love of Hindu Swamis. And she always read straight through the society columns. In fact she read everything in the newspapers except the news.

So it was she who discovered that Lucy Hawthorn was back in America. It was quite a shock to come upon the name of some one who was a real person to her, among all the well known but unseen Vanderbilts and Whitneys and Astors. "Countess de la Ville-

blanche, who will be remembered as Lucy Hawthorn——"

Her first impulse was not to tell Victor. Lucy home again and a widow—she'd be certain to grab him if he gave her half a chance! And she saw herself alone and old. Her better nature triumphed in a minute—besides, she would burst if she kept such an exciting bit of news untold. But it would be just as well to have things especially pleasant when she told him. Somehow, though she tried so hard, home wasn't the same without Maggie.

He was having Sunday supper somewhere in Wilmington. She would sit up for him, and make some candy to have for a surprise when he came in.

Out in the kitchen she and a little mouse gave each other a good scare—she jumped so that she knocked over the vanilla bottle. Oh dear! Tears came to her eyes. But she got up quite a lot of vanilla with a spoon.

It was so still that she could hear the tinkle of falling icicles, pure and exquisite sound. Alone in the house at night. It was sort of scary when you let yourself think about it.

Alone in the house. And she and Victor weren't as young as they used to be. Suppose—something should happen to one of them? What would the other do? Alone in the house, alone in the world.

They said it was a sign of getting old when time slipped past faster and faster. It made her dizzy, the

world was spinning around so these days, spinning from blue and gold to black and silver, so fast that not a drop was spilled from the rivers and seas, not a pot of flowers fell from a window sill, not a bird's egg fell from its nest. Standing in the quiet kitchen that suddenly opened out vast and unfamiliar, she felt herself clinging head down to the whirling globe that would some day spin her off altogether.

In a panic she began to clatter pots and spoons, to sing a hymn they had sung when they were children.

" 'Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me;
Bless Thy little lamb tonight;
Through the darkness be Thou near me——' "

The house grew friendly again. "Tickticktick!" said the clock, brisk and cheerful. She could hear the mice scratching in the walls—it sounded as if they were having fun together. The boiling chocolate made a thick bubbling sound and smelt delicious.

" 'Boil till it forms in a soft ball in cold water,' " she said aloud. Good little soft balls! She ate five or six of them before she suddenly remembered that it was time to pour the candy out and she had forgotten to butter the soup plates.

It turned nice and hard—a pleasant surprise, so often her candy had to be eaten with a spoon. She marked it off into squares, sampling a good many. Fudge or caramels? She couldn't make up her mind. She filled a dish and took it in to the living-room,

where she had a game of her favorite Tiddley-winks—another game—another. She wasn't quite sure about playing Tiddley-winks on Sunday, but she was so lonely in the evening without Maggie, she had to do something. Just *one* more game. And as she played her hand strayed from the dish to her mouth.

When Victor came in, wrapped in cold March air, the dish was empty. She couldn't believe it!

"Oh, *Victor!* I made them all for you—for a surprise!"

She could have cried, if she hadn't remembered her other surprise.

"Guess what!"

"What?"

"Well—Lucy Hawthorn's back in New York—oh, I humbly beg her pardon, I should have said Her Royal Highness, the Countess of de la Ville-blanche——"

Lucy home again! The little feet that had carried her so far were bringing her back to him. And he saw himself receiving into his arms that piteous and fragile figure, heard her say brokenly:

"Victor—at last——"

Should he write to her? He tore up three letters, and then wrote one light in tone but with hidden depths, he really did think, and posted it in a perfect panic. And back came a note from Lucy, so charming

that it sounded as if she had come back to America just for his sake.

He decided to go to New York to see her. He could go in the morning and come back after supper, and then he needn't tell Lily anything about it.

Would she be changed? But people didn't change really. He was the same Victor who had come to New York to see Lucy years ago—he felt as young, if he admitted the truth, he felt as nervous. He walked from the Pennsylvania Station to the Ritz, dreamily escaping death among the taxi-cabs. Coming for a moment out of his absorption in the queer feeling growing in the pit of his stomach, he noticed a man with a tray of flowers for sale, among them a few little bunches of lilies-of-the-valley with leaves as tender and pale a green as butterfly wings. Lilies-of-the-valley. "Lucy's flowers." Their sweetness would build a bridge across the years, they would say the things he could not. He bought a bunch and slipped it in its screw of waxed paper into his overcoat pocket.

And then he was in Lucy's apartment at the Ritz, and Lucy herself was holding his hand between hers. Lucy? But where was Lucy? This fat old woman with her powered face and reddened mouth and her queer coppery hair, wearing no jewels but the three strands of great pearls laid on the shelf of her bosom, and draped in heaviest crêpe, mourning as one who eats caviare, oysters, sole *marguery*, mourns because Christ died upon a Friday, what had she done with

Lucy? Was his slim white dryad really there, imprisoned in this tree with its roots in the earth?

"Victor! After all these years—no, dreadful man, don't dare to say how many! My daughter Madame de Griche—Mrs. Portal, Mrs. Lee, General Scudworth—my grandson Marcel—Monsieur Campion is a dear and old friend of Grand'maman's, *p'tit*—my little grand-daughter Lucie. Tea! Tea! Ring for tea, Colette, *chérie*. Tell them heaps of *confitures!* Don't sit on Galette or Chrysanthème, anyone——"

Madame de Griche, ugly and chic, her black hair cut like a boy's, the pearls in her ears and the cigarette drooping from her lacquer-red mouth startlingly white against her yellow skin, was pouring the tea. There were dishes heaped with the ruby and topaz of jam and marmalade, mauve tin boxes from Sherry's stood open, disclosing chocolates and small rich cakes, the room was full of flowers wilting a little in the steam heat—white lilac really swooning, blue and yellow iris, powdery-sweet mimosa. The two silky, fat toy dogs, like lumps of half-melted toffee, were yapping and being fed chocolates by Lucy, whose stern little grand-daughter was chiding her. "*Non, non, Grand' maman, c'est méchant! Va-tu, Chrysanthème! Chrysanthème! Galette! Taïssez-vous, mauvaises chiens!*" Boxes were arriving, the telephone ringing, Marcel's high voice was crying into it, "Alloh, Alloh!" Old friends rushed in and were embraced.

"*Le téléphone, Maman!*"

Lucy took the teapot. "How do you take your tea, Victor?"

"Two lumps and cream, please."

So she gave him lemon, saying, "Now we must have a long, long talk about the dear old days!" But things kept happening.

And then his body followed his spirit that had long ago hurried away towards home. The March air flowed cool and delicious over his hot face, he let his mouth relax from its stretch of polite and nervous smile. He could catch the six o'clock train, he would be home before ten!

He had let his bunch of lilies-of-the-valley stay crushed in his pocket. They had been too gentle. And he thought sadly, complacently:

"Poor Lucy, how fat she has grown—and how old!"

Chapter Thirty-three

LILY didn't really mind getting old. Not that sixty-six was old, but it certainly wasn't young. Sometimes, when the house was cold and she shivered in spite of her shabby blue sweater, or when her mayonnaise "went back on her," or she couldn't put off going to the dentist any longer, she was sad. But there were market days when she stayed in Wilmington and had a chocolate sundae at Reynold's for lunch, and bought a quarter of a pound of bitter-chocolate peppermints to eat at the movies. There were happy nights of early to bed, with a hot-water bag and a moving picture magazine—beautiful Mr. Valentino in a sash and a broad-brimmed hat, Barbara La Marr's velvet mouth, and stories about how much those nice Talmadge girls loved their mother, the innocence of darling little Jackie Coogan, and what a good husband Mr. Menjou was in spite of his lifted eyebrows. "How good everybody is, when you really *know*," thought Lily. And there were the stars' bedrooms—she pored over every detail. Dolls in hoopskirts that hatched out telephones, cushions trimmed with bunches of silk fruit—rather knobby for the head? Still, as they were mostly strewn about the floor, perhaps you weren't meant to put your head down on them.

And going to the postoffice was exciting—not many letters, but she sent for so many things that there was almost always mail for her. Samples of perfumes, of cold cream, of note paper, "Orchid" and "Willow-Green" and "Straw," catalogues of Dutch bulbs and peasant furniture, booklets about trips around the world.

And there was always church, the changing of the colored hangings, flowers on the altar, the luxurious warm bath of the soul of her prayers.

But Victor hated growing old, and fought against it, jumping off cars before they stopped, and walking jauntily away, refusing to wear an overcoat when he was blue with cold— *wanting* to be young.

"I will do exercises and take cold plunges," he decided, not for the first time. "That's the way for a fellow to keep young." And morning after morning, Lily heard him puffing, panting, grunting—thump—thump—thump—heard the water roaring into the tub, and then the splash that meant most of it was leaping out again, hastily followed by Victor. She was dreadfully worried about the parlor ceiling.

"Wonderful the feeling of vitality it gives you," he told the bored men at the office. "I get the greatest reaction out of an ice-cold plunge, just as cold as it comes, no luke-warm baths for yours truly, I leave those for the old fellows." He would stop the most casual acquaintances to tell them about his exercises and cold baths. "Why don't *you* try it, old man?"

But gradually they tapered off and stopped. He began to drink buttermilk. He had read somewhere that buttermilk would keep you young practically forever.

His clothes were getting old, too. There was his fur-lined coat, with the fur collar, that he hadn't realized wasn't still something to be proud of, until one day someone said to him:

"You ought to give that coat back to the rat and let it finish it."

It was as scrubby as that! So scrubby that a friend could think he was just wearing it to be funny. And he pretended he was. He thrust a hand into its breast, put out one foot, and declaimed:

"Methinks, you wot not that you address Hamfat, the famous tragedian!"

But his heart was crying.

There weren't as many invitations as there used to be. People weren't entertaining as much as they had entertained before the war, he told himself. But he went everywhere he was asked, and he paid a great many calls.

Four members of Dorothy Spear's house party were playing Mah Jongg at the top of their lungs, four more were dancing to "It Ain't Goin' to Rain No More," played by the gramophone. Dorothy herself lay stretched on the sofa, slender legs in flesh-colored

silk stockings showing to the knees, waving a cigarette in a long holder at Gregory Hart to emphasize a few remarks on suppressed desires.

"Love your cigarette holder, Dot!" Bunny Tempest called as she fox-trotted past.

"You ought to see Edwina's—hers is so long she has to have a flute case to carry it in. Throw us another Lucky, Tommy!"

Two more friends appeared in the doorway, the girl slender and straight as a pencil, her painted baby face framed in a tight cloche and a great roll of fur collar, the boy voluminous in raccoon coat, with much pale blue muffler.

"Hello, you dumb-bells!"

"Hello, yourselves! Don't you look Ritzy? Take off a few clothes—oh, my *dear*, what a *per*fect boyish bob! Oh, it looks simply *darling*, I'm *crazy* about it!"

"She looks like a drowned kitten."

"Oh, ankle along, you Victorian! Don't pay any attention to him, Mariette, if he *is* your fiasco!"

Mrs. Spear paused at the door on the way upstairs for a nap, and said resignedly:

"Dorothy, your legs."

"Nice, aren't they?"

"Pull down your skirt, darling."

"Listen to my *precious* mother! She's a scream, boys and girls. Don't you think she's a *scream?* You are, you know, Ma!"

"Play something else—'Doo Wacky Doo' or something."

"Come and dance, Dot."

The hurrying excitement of the music shook them—a queer stab went through her as Gregory held her closer. She was almost too breathless to say mockingly:

"Oh, you passionate orchid-crusher!"

"Look at King Tut coming up the drive!" someone called from the window seat, and someone else cried, "What is it? I *ask* you, what *is* it?"

Dorothy looked over their heads. Mr. Victor Campion in his high silk hat, out making Sunday afternoon calls.

"Oh, my dears, he's our hardy perennial bachelor. Stop the music—grab Thompson, someone, before he gets to the door—if we once let him in he'll stay to tea and Lord knows how much longer. Thompson—Thompson—not at home——"

She watched him turn away, and an unexpected pang of pity stirred in her heart.

"This used to be his home—it must be queer to have us in it. He and three old maid sisters used to live here. One of them went dippy from sex repression—just like what we were talking about, Greg. Too bad they didn't have her psyched. There's only one left, and she certainly is the hole in the doughnut. Well—might as well turn on the music."

Victor walked down the drive. Had he heard

smothered giggling when the door was opened? There was the beech tree they used to play under, Maggie and May and Lily and he. Should he make some more calls? No, he was tired, and it was chilly and late. There was snow in that sky, though a cold pink colored the west. Sunset. Soon it would be dark.

Lily was watching for him at the window, standing over the register, her skirts ballooning with heat. She ran to the door to let him in.

"Oh, Victor, you did look so nice coming along the road! I always think there's no one in the world looks as nice in a silk hat as you!"

THE END

The

Harper Prize Novel

Contest

The Harper Prize Novel Contest

IT was in 1922 that Harper & Brothers inaugurated their Prize Novel Contest. The purpose which animated this award was the desire to make it easier for the younger writers to find a publisher for novels dealing with American life and with those new and fresh currents which have become characteristic of our scene. The conditions of the Contest were drawn up in such wise as to encourage to the utmost the untried writers while, at the same time, taking in those of recently established reputations.

"THE PERENNIAL BACHELOR," by Anne Parrish, is the winning novel in the 1925 Harper $2,000 Novel Contest. The 1925 Contest is the second competition arranged by the House, which was fortunate in being able to retain two of the judges of the First Contest. This second award goes to a book of conspicuous quality—a book whose scene is Delaware for a period of some seventy years. It is thus a novel of American life of uncommon richness, and the skill and emotion that have gone into its writing give it an intensity that is memorable.

"THE ABLE MCLAUGHLINS," by Margaret Wilson, won the prize in the First Harper Contest. The judges were Jesse Lynch Williams, then President of The Authors' League of America, Carl Van Doren, and

Henry Seidel Canby. The Contest stimulated a widespread interest among the younger fiction writers, and a total of seven hundred and thirty-nine full-length novels were submitted.

The wisdom of the judges received an extraordinary endorsement in the award of the 1923 Pulitzer Prize, announced June 4, 1924, to "THE ABLE MCLAUGHLINS," "for the American novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standards of American manners and manhood."

The award of the Contest judges, corroborated and emphasized by the Pulitzer Award, firmly established the critical and literary value of the Harper Prize Contest. It is most encouraging, too, particularly for the young author, to know that the financial awards of the contest are very substantial, for in addition to the $2,000 Prize, "THE ABLE MCLAUGHLINS" has gone through numerous editions to a total considerably in excess of 100,000 copies.

The judges in the Second Contest were Jesse Lynch Williams, Carl Van Doren, and Stewart P. Sherman. In addition to the Prize Winner, a number of other books received the warm endorsement of the judges, and Harper & Brothers will publish several of these in the near future.

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By Margaret Wilson

Here is the book that has been so eagerly awaited since the extraordinary success of "The Able McLaughlins," winner of the Harper 1922-23 Prize Novel Contest and the 1923 Pulitzer Prize. Of the brave, tempestuous lives of the Kenworthys, Miss Wilson has fashioned an equally distinguished novel; with the same deftly turned humor and swift characterization, the same delightful comedy and poignant pathos.

GERTRUDE HAVILAND'S DIVORCE
By Inez Haynes Irwin

Into the placid domesticity of Gertrude Haviland's life dropped a thunderbolt—her husband's letter asking her to divorce him, to set him free to marry another woman. What she does and how she does it is the story Mrs. Irwin tells, a brave-hearted, level-headed tale that looks at life as it is and as it might be.

THE PERENNIAL BACHELOR
By Anne Parrish

Mirroring with fidelity and great beauty the rich period from 1850 to the present, this novel of American life will delight discriminating readers. It is a book of both tears and laughter, with a current of deeply moving emotions under its gay ripples of humor.

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